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THE ORIGINAL SCIENCE FICTION

SEPT. 1959

STORIES

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BERK EDMONDS WANTED TO
END AS AN EXPLORER

by Jim Harmon



THE INVADERS' CODE DECLARED

TO ERR IS INHUMAN

by Marion Zimmer Bradley



EARTHMEN HAD FORGOTTEN--

BEAUTY LIES IN THE

EYE OF THE BEHOLDER

by Robert Silverberg





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STORIES

VOLUME 10

SEPTEMBER, 1959

NUMBER 4

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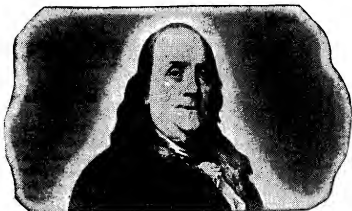
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end as an explorer

illustrated by Emsb

by Jim Harmon

It was man against machine, as the planet-converter set about to change this alien world into a duplicate of Earth, and Berk Edmonds tried to prove that the converter couldn't handle everything. Which got difficult when the machine produced a wife and companion colonists for Edmonds!

IT SEEMED to Berk Edmonds that space was ending with a brick wall. The inventor of the infernal machine, Professor Armand W. Grier, could only smilingly disagree.

"No, no, Berk; it is the end of the *exploration* of space but only the beginning of the conquest of space," Grier said toothsomely.

Who does he think he is?

Edmonds wondered. The Mona Lisa?

"That's fine," he replied to the professor "but I happen to be a licensed explorer, guild dues paid up, triple star company rating. What happens to me and the rest like me?"

"Inside jobs," came the tentative suggestion.

"They have robots to sweep the floors these days."

"Don't overcompensate.



The Converter was taking a direct hand — it seized the humanoids one by one...

You'll all get executive jobs."

He nodded. "I'm sure we will, the guild is pretty active. But I can't see myself behind a desk from here on in."

Grier shrugged. "Go colonize, then. There will be plenty of that going on now."

"So you've done it. Got a machine that shifts over a planet ecology to Terrestrial just like that?" Edmonds supplied the snap of his fingers.

"It was inevitable. You explorers were merely bringing back data to be fed to cybernetics, which then told the climatizers what to do to a world to get it in shape for human people."

"So you put it all in one unit. Cut out the middle man."

"Inevitable, as I said. Merely a process of miniaturization. Technological progress allowed us to build cybernetic brains smaller and smaller. So small now there is no reason not to take the data-processing machines along with you and let the climatizers start their work. They can handle anything they come up against?"

"Can they?" Edmonds asked. "Listen, Grier, space is

high and wide. You can't program a machine that can handle any and every situation. You need a man to go out and size up the situation and bring it back in his head, or on paper, for other men to think about and work out. The spoor-finder, the guy who rides point, the explorer—you need him."

GRIER OBSERVED mildly, "Social structures change. At one time, the position of the lackey was secure in every society; he was the miserable slob who did everybody's dirty work. But with the internal combustion engine came an end to the need for a horse-dung shoveler; and mores changed until cuspidors were regarded as uncouth. The lackey went out of business after a history stretching back to the dawn of erect-walking man. As you observed, we have robots to sweep floors these days. The explorer, too, has seen his day. Take it with good form."

"Oh, no," Edmonds said. "I won't do that. I'll go down kicking, scratching, howling, cussing. Men just don't die gracefully—it helps them stay

alive when they become rude about dying."

"You're getting hysterical," the scientist said disdainfully. "No one is killing you. You've just got to change your job."

"After fifteen years' overlapping puberty, where does the job stop and me begin? I'm Berk Edmonds, Explorer. Cut off the last part of my identity and you chop me in two. Suppose the Council turns over all scientific inquiry to cybernetics—you want to change *your* job, Grier?"

"My work is creative," he answered wearily. "Exploration is purely interpretative, mechanical. If it wasn't for your guild, all the scout ships would have been robot long ago. Maybe you can work out some featherbedding arrangement where you will ride along with the World-Converters."

"Your pet name for your damned gadget."

"World-Converter? Yes," he said modestly. "I thought it summed it up rather neatly."

"When does the first of these behemoths burn off?" Edmonds asked abruptly.

"Come now, Berkley. We're

chums, but I can't reveal cross-department confidentials."

"Listen, Chum, I want to be on that test flight of your invention..."

Grier coughed. "My *department's* development. I was only the guiding genius. And did they have Simon LeGree as a conductor on the Underground Railway? The only reason you would want to be on board would be to louse up the flight in some way, and make it look as if explorers were still necessary."

EDMONDS displayed some handsome cap work on his incisors. "You tuned in the right channel at last. You just bet I will. But think about it. Your gimcracks are supposed to be able to handle *anything*. I tell you they will run up against a lot worse things on some planets than a spot of internal sabotage."

Grier pursed his lips. "True. But I want this test flight to be a success, remember. I would just as soon it was under ideal conditions, not the most difficult ones imaginable."

"Of course, of course. But more important than success,

you want the *truth*. You are a man of *science*."

"Foull!" Grier yelled. "You're hitting above the eyebrows. But you've got something there—a cunning instinct for animal survival. I don't think you can foul up the W-C, but if you succeed you are going to die out there. Cybernetics and the climatizers are in irresolvable sequence. They will be your way of staying alive or getting back. Do you hope to ruin this test just so your breed won't cease to be extant?"

"I'm not *that* crazy." Edmonds said truthfully.

Grier ran a finger along his jaw, "This is going to call for a bit of company intrigue, getting you on that ship. How much can you scrape up for bribes?"

"At last," Edmonds said, "I've found something to do with all that back pay I piled up."



THE WORLD looked right to Edmonds. His lean fingers typed out the approach sequence on his manual influence board. The circuits of the World-Converter were able to

override his suggestions if they ran counter to necessity. But after a moment of clucking indecision, the spaceship decided that there was nothing contrary to logic in landing on this planet.

A green hell, Edmonds decided confidently. He only had the overdrive co-ordinants for it so far. It would take several days to get it placed in real space with his sextant and compass after landing. It looked deceptively like Earth from nuclear drive range, a shimmering jewel of sapphire and emerald against black velvet. It was always the little green ones that were tricky.

Never trust a planet that looks like Earth, the explorer's creed stated firmly.

The Converter was going to have its tractor beams full with this one.

As they made orbit on the threshold of atmosphere, Edmonds read the gauges confidently. The air was heavy on nitrogen but with quite a bit of free oxygen—He brightened. There were a number of fatal poison gases loose—ozone, for one—but they all seemed in trace amounts. In fact, the at-

mosphere was almost a ringer for Earth's. Naturally, the gravity was about the same, too. It was .979 of Earthnorm. But, he knew, there was no forecasting what insidious things that .021 difference could do to a man under these particular circumstances.

He let the ship pick its own place to 'land'. He chuckled over the word. 'Land'. He allowed himself a guffaw. Probably a thin crust of silicon over a core of nitrous acid. The spacer would probably have reflex time fast enough to disengage its primary contact section and jet before complete submersion. He would like to see a climatizer go to work on an all liquid planet. There *were* stories about what the newer models could do, but he didn't believe it.

THE G'S OF deceleration piled onto him without relenting. The liquid of the couch swelled up around him in great bags of plastic, threatening to pop like balloons but never quite doing it.

He was getting lighter—700 pounds, 300, then 190. They

were down. The spaceship had made a secure landing.

Edmonds squished up into a sitting position and looked at the video closely.

Scan that treacherous foliage, he thought. *Looks just like chlorophyll stuff*. He checked spectroanalysis. They *were* chlorophyll plants.

Of course, the Terrestrial type of crystalline alkaloid poisoning was interesting, and who knew what variations had bred here? A lettered rectangle lit on the board. EDIBLE.

No doubt they were highly organized plant forms with photosensitive areas approximating neural paths, deadly as Earth's Venus Fly Trap with its 10 cubed with an exponential of genius.

But he hardly had to look at the teletyped report. With a hollow feeling he knew it would say they were simple, self-pollinating plants. No, he was wrong. They were simple, *cross* pollinating plants.

The depressing reality of the situation was at last inescapable; this planet was a virtual twin of Earth—the long-sought mathematical probability of a world nearly duplicat-

ing Terra. Explorers had been searching for it for generations, and now Berk Edmonds had to be the one to find it.

There was practically nothing the World-Converter needed to do to change this planet's conditions to those of Earth. It would register a perfect reconditioning.

I'll have to change the records, he realized. I'll have to make it look as if the Converter had a bigger and harder job than it really had—or it will look as if I was trying to fake the log to make it appear that the machine only had a snap of a task.

If he didn't fake the records, they would look so badly faked they would earn him a court-martial.

HE TOSSED his head savagely and tried to shake off that disturbing train of thought. It was, after all, a minor consideration. His foremost job was to reveal the actual inadequacies of the infernal contraption.

Sure, it said this planet was almost Earthlike to begin with—but it had to be wrong.

It just had to be, or his plot wouldn't jell.

He thought about it a moment more and finally did become convinced that the machine not only had to be wrong for his own personal reasons, but *was* actually wrong.

Green dwarf planets were always deceptive. Every explorer knew that. This one must represent the ultimate in deception.

The air was breathable, the gravity bearable, the vegetation edible, the terrain solid and predictable. That could only mean that the fauna was imaginatively omnivorous.

And what animal could be as deadly as man?

Man.

That had to be the answer—not only had he discovered the long-sought twin of Earth, he had found the home of the only other true humanoid race in the Galaxy.

The idea struck him sick with fright. A race as cunning, unscrupulous, relentless, daring as Mankind. Some cybernetic device armed with mass traction beams was supposed to be able to cope with *that*?

Another rectangle lit on the manual influence board.

NO INTELLIGENT LIFE-FORMS.

Well, what did *it* know? What if a complete air survey failed to reveal signs of construction or destruction by intelligent life? There were always underground caverns. So maybe there weren't any suggestions of thinking beings' activities in the analysis of the air, in the vibrations of the air, in the vibrations of the ground, in the condition of the soil and water. Machines could be fooled. An intelligent race was dedicated in hiding itself from alien visitors. They had done it entirely and successfully.

This was fine with Edmonds. He didn't want the Converter to find the aliens. But he had to find them himself to prove that a man could do things a mechanical brain and super-body couldn't.

The Converter was right about this planet being nearly like Earth, but it was wrong because it didn't know how *much* it was like Earth—even to its inhabitants.

A disorientating thought made Edmonds momentarily

dizzy. Suppose this *was* Earth. Suppose they had sent him up in the robot ship, faked the subspace switch somehow and landed him in, say, Amazon National Park. "You've been working too hard, boy," he told himself. He wasn't a paranoid and there wasn't any plot against him. The Council wanted to test the World-Converter ships not one tried and true and tired explorer.

AN EXPLOSION rocked him in the bucket seat.

Deftly, he punched Activity Observation. A huge, angry-faced black mountain, identified as being a few hundred miles away, was boiling away under chain fusion. Why was the machine picking on an in-offensive mountain?

He checked the co-ordinates. Of course: It was higher than Everest, and so could not be tolerated on an Earth-norm planet. Nonsense. It would have drawn mountain climbers from all over the Galaxy. The damned machine had ruined one of the planet's chief tourist attractions. The future merchants and hotel owners weren't going to like that.

Edmonds thumbed the DE-SIST button on the manual influence board. OVERRIDE lit peevisly. The mountain continued to dissolve. *Just as well. Now it will be on record that I tried to stop the beast and it went ahead, ignoring human control.*

For the next few hours he watched while the Converter made minor adjustments—changing the course of rivers, irrigating deserts, leveling forests, killing a Conservation-controlled quota of Griffins, Behemoths, and sea serpents. The machine deposited all of a race of humanoids on a near continent-sized island in the second largest sea. For a time he considered whether these might not be the intelligent race but he rejected the idea.

ASSIGNMENT COMPLETED. PLANET EARTH-NORM.

That was what the sign said, lighting up the top of the control board. The damn thing, he decided, looks like a pinball machine. A siren should go off along with a string of fire-crackers, while two Commonwealth flags shoot out of slots and begin waving furiously.

So the machine was through, huh?

Dandy.

Now *he* could get down to the real work of exploring and discover everything it had missed, primarily the intelligent race.

THE ALIENS would try to kill him of course, but he had dealt with aliens before, some more deadly than mere men—such as he expected to find here.

All he had to do was get out of the ship and start exploring. That posed something akin to a problem. There was no way out of the spaceship; it was hermetically sealed.

A spacer fully equipped with the best cybernetic brain available, and a complete if compact climatizer, could reasonably be expected to repair any damage to itself, short of complete annihilation. The ship had been built around Edmonds—he was a part of it, a minor, last-minute part. When the ship was disassembled for overhaul, he would be removed like a suspect valve or a leaky pile rod. Until then, he stuck. They didn't expect or want

him to leave the ship. It hadn't even been certain whether the spacer would land or do all its work from orbit. Edmonds had suggested a landing and hadn't been overriden.

Edmonds had anticipated this moment. The biggest object in his cramped living quarters was a Tri-Di set. He had brought this along instead of a library this trip. So many condemned Easterns had crossed his eyes that the thought of a trench-coated hero in a shining black sedan made him ill. But the set would serve its purpose.

TAKING down the kit of spare parts for the set, he used the screwdriver to unfasten the set from the bulkhead and take off the back of the set. Why did Tri-Di sets always have screws with a single slit across them? Everybody had X-tipped screwdrivers for X-slotted screws which wouldn't fit. It was almost like a conspiracy to keep you out of your own set. Fortunately, the repair kit had one of the exotic single-blade screwdrivers.

Edmonds leered happily at the printed command: *Do Not Remove Back While Set Is In Operation—Deadliest Danger!* He unbolted the chassis and slipped it from the cabinet. He ran down the power circuit from the diagram in the lid of the repair kit, humming contentedly. Tracing the triply cable from the power feed-back to the staging area of the performance, Edmonds began worrying the cable in two with a diamond-drill gun. The ragged ends finally lay exposed.

It was actually incredible, the amount of power that was built up and consumed inside a Tri-Di set to build the performances on the stage. Now he had this power exposed.

He checked his pockets to see that he had everything he needed, then shoved the set chassis over to the outer bulkhead. Fingering the cable, he decided it was well enough insulated. He touched the raw end of it to the wall, and felt for the baffle of the *off-on* switch. He found it and turned on the self-contained portable.

The star of light on the end of the cable ate through the

Impervium hull like a hot spoon through sherbet.

EDMONDS sat down and rested, with the spaceship still within sight over the tops of the trees.

The log was disgustingly soft and squishy. Something would have to be done to these trees to make them duplicates of Terrestrial trees. The ship had done only a superficial job.

He exhaled deeply. He had seen no sign of intelligent life.

"I even did everything I could to show these critters I was snooping for them, trying to pinpoint their hideout," Edmonds said to himself and anybody who might be listening. "They should know by this time that I'm on to them, and am itching to reveal their existence to the rest of my people so we can come and exploit them."

Who knows? They might have binary calculators to break down and translate speech patterns. They might even be telepathic. He kept his thoughts cheerfully hostile.

"It's no use," he said. "They must not be in this area. I'll

have to bamboozle the brain into setting down the ship in another spot."

Edmonds decided to make a great circle toward the ship, one designed to carry him as far as his stamina would take him and still get him back to home base.

An unimpressive pink sunset was changing to a lavender twilight as he trudged back into the clearing made by the ship. As he approached, he noticed that the spacer had healed itself and closed the door he had opened in its side.

He had expected that and had left the chassis of the portable Tri-Di player outside. It was in the shadow of the fin of the atmospheric stabilizer he had shimmied down. Except that it wasn't; the set was gone.

The aliens had taken it!

They had him trapped outside the ship.

He sighed contentedly, sat down on the rigorously decontaminated ground of the blast-down area, and leaned back against the cool metal hull, hands behind his neck.

Let them come after him now.

He would trust the nuclear, gravitational, and transmutational arms of the World-Converter against any army of hostile Aliens. After a trained explorer had roused the army for the super-brain, the idiot!

AS THE MINUTES passed, the Hershey bar that Edmonds was munching began to turn to lead in his mouth. Somebody or something was watching him. A single large satellite illuminated the clearing fairly brightly, but the woods were a tangle of shadows.

He did not imagine the occasional twin gleam of eyes in there, but then he knew there were animals around. Somehow he didn't imagine the gaze from the direction of the woods. Somehow, it seemed to come—he finally pinpointed it—from above.

He looked up into the focusing lens of a video projection from the hull. The Converter was looking at him.

"Finally—noticed me, eh, Beast? Think think, think. What are you going to do with me? I'm a man; I'm one of the

guys you are converting this planet for."

Of course, the machine had not been actually aware that he had been riding in its belly. His commands from the manual influence board were only suggestions such as it received from other data-processing, independent schizoid areas of its brain. But now that it was aware of Berk Edmonds' external existence it would have to serve him, as it had to serve all men.

He stood up and cleared his throat. "Admit me to the compartment behind the area you had to repair a few hours ago."

Sure enough! A section of the hull began raising; there were doors he had never been told about.

From out of the opening section, a metal arm extended ending with a crab-like hand. The hand didn't look so much designed to *hold* but to *cut*.

SOMEHOW, Edmonds managed to reason it all out rather quickly, although he was more of a man of action than logic.

The Converter, not the Ali-

ens, had disposed of his power-source set because it did not fit in with the conditions expected on a planet just converted to Earthnorm. On a virgin planet like this, things of Earth were premature and out of place; they must have seemed alien to the Converter.

The Converter did not see him, Edmonds, as an Earthman, but as an alien on a planet it was converting to Earthnorm. A planet with humanoid aliens is not Earthnorm for potential colonists. The Converter would want to dispose of this alien race to make it habitable for Terrestrials. But first, of course, it might wish to *dissect* a member of that race to find its weaknesses and plan the extermination.

This is hopeless, Edmonds decided, running like hell.

ONCE AGAIN the "hollow log" began closing in on Edmonds who lay inside it, tasting him with its pores and trying to languidly assimilate him whole. He gave it a savage poke with his elbow, kicked it a little, and it retreated to a wider diameter.

The damned Converter ship

could wipe out this whole forest if it chose to. The only reason it could be holding off was that it wanted to take one specimen of the "alien" race on this planet alive. Since Berk Edmonds was the only man on the planet, all he had to worry about was being taken alive.

Or was it?

If he was right about there being a human-like race here, the Converter might grab one of *them* first and casually erase this stand of trees.

Whoosh.

The sudden sound was unnerving. Swallowing the pulse in his throat, Edmonds slid exactly half his pupil around the edge of the log. The tops of all the trees within sight were missing. It came back clearly to him that he had at first considered hiding among the tree limbs.

Obviously, the Converter ship had removed the top of the forest in order to be able to look for him more conveniently.

The log chose this moment to tentatively taste him once again. He gave it a vicious lick.

I can't stay here forever, he reluctantly admitted to him-

self. Fall asleep for an hour and the log was sure to digest him.

Make a run for it, he decided. The tree stumps still offered him some protection as cover. He would only be exposed if the Converter was sighting in an absolutely vertical position above him.

Defly he stripped off the metal foil from some of the chocolate bars in his pockets and tore it into small pieces.

"Here goes the confetti for the party."

He blew the bits of foil out of the palm of his hand into the clearing outside the log, and catapulted himself out into the metallic snow. The breeze sent the pieces of the morning sun dancing in gay patterns.

That, he thought, should louse up anybody's radar.

Panting, he slapped the gnarled trunk on the other side of the meadow and found it solid, secure. He looked back at the log where he had spent the night. It was smacking its opening. He had forgotten the stripped candy bars.

Something tapped him on the shoulder.

Instinctively, E d m o n d s

turned and found himself grabbed by iron hands.

EARTHMEN are the nicest people of all people. Aliens are nice but not as nice as Earth people. Some of your best friends are reptiles, birds, amphibians, fish, and energy forces, but you wouldn't want your sister to marry one.

A is for apple.

B is for butter.

C is for cosmic.

D is for demon...

Open doors for ladies.

George Washington was the father of his country...

Goddard, Von Braun, Ley, Harriman...

Take your books and study.

What? What? What?

At last, Edmonds realized he was sitting on some kind of sleeping cot, nursing the stud of all headaches.

Nervously, he felt the texture of the blanket with his hands, the coolness of the welded wall. An alien prison cell? No. He rested his forehead against metal. He recognized the construction design of the World-Converter spaceship's bulkheads. He was back on board, and seemingly—he ran

his fingers over himself experimentally—undissected. Yet.

What was all that stuff about school that kept going through his mind? Something about books. His hand touched something beside him on the bed. A book. A stack of books.

Edmonds' body turned sharply and his hand scooped up the books. He had no choice in the matter. Post-hypnotic command. He recognized it from experience in psychology class.

YOU AND THE ALPHABET (The Alphabet as a Living Reality for the First Grade Child and Pre-School Child).

THE EMILY POST BOOK.

EVERY BOY'S BOOK OF HEROES.

He ran through a complex formula for release from post-hypnotic suggestions he had once learned and set down the books, still with a tickling, insidious, almost sexual urge to study them.

His head still hurt too bad to ask many questions. All he knew was that he was imprisoned and he had to break out.

He looked beyond the corner where the cot stood around the

rest of the cell. The concept of cell vanished. The hatch stood wide open.

EDMONDS stumbled over to the doorway anxiously, and caught himself just before he fell across the threshold and down several hundred feet.

Momentarily he had forgotten just how big the ship really was. And that it had not been designed for human habitation. This cubical was cut out of a mirror-smooth concave surface, with no ladder, handholds, or elevator for a man to go down or up. Something—something like a traction beam or working arm—had picked him up and set him down here. Unless he wanted a fall that, for all practical considerations, would remove thickness from the dimensions of his body he was going to stay here until the beam or arm picked him up again.

Below him, Edmonds caught the flash of a traction beam. The magnetized dust motes in the current always reflected a gray sheen. He stood to the side of the doorway to see if the illumination from the cell—the concept returned—would

light up anything below. It did, dimly.

The ship had some kind of workshop down there. It was tooling up several objects. There was the Tri-Di set he had burned his way out with. No, it wasn't. That had been a cheap little portable spool player. This set was a huge Amphitheater model, the Suburbanite's Delight. No home was complete without one. A few yards away, geared polishers were doing something to some plumbing units of a disgusting shocking pink pastel.

Edmonds turned away. It was things like Amphitheater Tri-Di's and pink commodes that had made him decide to leave Earth behind and become an explorer.

Something new was happening.

A SOMEWHAT funny, large humanoid was struggling in the grip of almost invisible bonds, squealing pitifully. It stopped abruptly. There was an electric crackle and the humanoid was cleaned of fur. It was a female.

Knives flashed through the air and began carving on the body. There was little blood.

A kind of axe lopped off the top of the humanoid's head as if it was a beanie. A clutch of transistors and printed circuits were dropped into the cavity and tied off in a certain manner. The top of the skull went back on.

As the minutes passed, Edmonds could see the creature's body taking the shape of an Earth woman.

Not a great beauty perhaps, but an attractive woman. Rather a housewifely type from the ads.

With a crushing sense of horror, Edmonds at last realized what had happened to him.

She *was* a housewife, that transformed humanoid. *His housewife!*

The Converter thought that he, Berk Edmonds, was an alien rightly enough, but it wasn't going to eliminate him before the Earthmen arrived. It was merely transforming him into a stereotyped Earthman. It was doing its job—converting raw alien material to Earthnorm standards.

★ ★ ★

“TOW ABOUT dropping
▲▲ over to our pad for a

snappy rubber of Martian bridge tonight, Berk, old bean?"

"Not tonight," Edmonds said to the tiny figure on the telephone screen. "Not this time, George."

"Righto. We'll come over to your place. Envy you that Tri-Di. Tonight's *Mustang* night."

"Wait, George," Edmonds said patiently. "I think that for this one night..."

"Righto. *We* come over there."

He didn't try to argue. George was, after all, only a humanoid. His intelligence had been souped up with a cybernetic implant but he was still a low-level moron like all the rest of them. Edmond's "wife", Martha, George's spouse, Gloria, the Post Man, Mr. Dark, Miss Chirpley. All transformed humanoids, products of the Converter ship's laboratory.

Edmonds crossed the living room cluttered with a mixture of period and contemporary pieces, and looked out on the quiet Terrestrial street. It was a short street—three houses on this side, one on the other. Mr. Dark's house stood to the

left—in it, Mr. Dark moved stealthfully from window to window a shadow with eyes on fire, always watching. In the house to the right, Miss Chirpley, the gay, gray woman often peeked neighborly out of her lace curtains but she was the old fairy who was their guardian from all harm. All three houses were identical split-level ranch homes. George and Gloria's house across the street had two extra rooms and a much bigger yard.

George was wealthier than Edmonds, the senior member of the firm. The only luxury and extravagance offered Edmonds was the king-size Tri-Di. George had everything else bigger and better—Caddy tailfins eight inches longer—and Edmonds had incentive in his little world.

The real estate office lay fifty miles away over the low, purple hills, the firm of *George & Berk*. They did all their business by mail and phone, of course. Edmonds had not included their secretary, Miss Jorgensen, along with the transformed humanoids. He suspected she was a true robot. Where did she live if she were

biological, not mechanical? No, he was certain she stored herself in the closet as soon as he and George left.

THE DOORBELL rang the Big Ben chimes.

Vowing once again to find a way to disconnect that thing, Edmonds crossed to the door and opened it.

"Morning, Mr. Berk," the Post Man said warmly around his corn cob pipe. "Important letter for you today."

Edmonds accepted the advertisement for the new Caddy with a nod.

"Say, Mr. Berk, you know I've only got your best interests at heart. Why, if I had a boy, I'd want him to be just like you. Mind if I speak like, well, a Dutch uncle?"

"Yes, I'd mind, you meddling old fool."

"Fine. Well, you hadn't ought to be anti-social. It's a bad thing to be anti-social. You shouldn't ought to refuse George when he wants to come over for a little Martian bridge. Can't tell what might happen if you do that. Why, the telephone might give you a terrific electrical shock. That shock

might be mighty painful, too. Mighty painful."

"All right," he said. "I'll remember."

The Post Man chuckled. "Another thing, boy, you shouldn't refuse the advice of a well-meaning old man like me. Something painful might happen." The old man reached out and shut Edmonds' door—he shut Edmonds' foot up in it. "You might get your foot caught in a door. You might get it crushed. That would be painful."

He strained against the door, the edge of the jam cutting into his fingers, until his knuckles cracked but it didn't help much, hardly at all. The bones in his instep were grinding together. In another second, they would crunch.

"All right," Edmonds said. Hot sweat was running into his eyes, washing out the yellow streaks of pain. "All right."

The Post Man released the door. "A good day to you, Mr. Berk."

He trudged off whistling a jingle through his teeth, sorting the envelopes in his hand.

Edmonds closed the door and leaned against it.

"Who was that at the door, dear?" Martha called.

He limped back to the dining room. "The Post Man. He almost crippled me."

"That's *nice*," Martha said. Her handsome brunet face beaming. "He's always doing something nice like that for people. He's an old dear."

Martha moved towards him. Her pneumatic hips swiveling. "Is there anything I can do to make you comfortable, dear?"

"Not right now, Martha," he said patiently.

He was glad that the Converter hadn't adapted any little humanoids for their children, and even more grateful that his and Martha's genes were biologically incompatible. Luckily, it was Terrestrial custom to wait to have children later.

"Pardon me, Martha," he said wearily, "I have to go out and talk to a rock again."

HIS FOOTSTEPS had worn a path in front of the spaceship. He followed the outline now without consciously thinking about it.

"Listen," he roared, pacing off the distance, "listen to me.

I know you can hear me. I *am* a human being, a man of Earth. You didn't teach me how to be a man. I *knew*. I rode inside you. You didn't know. You weren't supposed to. You were to think you were on your own."

He stopped in front of the ship. "Your job is done, Converter. Go home. Tell them I'm here. What are you waiting for?"

The spaceship didn't answer him. It didn't have to. Edmonds knew the ship was waiting for him to become perfectly adapted as a normal human being. Lord only knew he tried to behave like a human being, but he had been an explorer for so long he couldn't adjust to human society, not completely, no matter how hard he tried. The Converter wouldn't wait forever. It would kill him, or stop making allowances for his greater brain development and outfit him with a cybernetic booster and control in his cranium. Edmonds shuddered.

"Can't you see I'm not a native of this world?" he screamed. "You only found one like me on the whole

world. If there were others, you would have found them." Edmonds knew, at last, that this was true. He had been wrong to suppose that there would have to be true humans on an Earth-like planet. Actually, the mathematical odds were long against such chance results recurring.

But if he, a human being, had been expecting human beings here, how could he expect a machine to doubt the data of its own senses that said there were humans here—or at least one?

This Converter was not a genius among cybernetic brains. With the climatizer units taking up so much space, there was not a tremendous amount of room for logic circuits in the ship. It was a glorified landscape gardener, not an abstract thinker.

"Look at me!" Edmonds demanded. "I'm a man, I am your master. You have to obey a man of Earth—it's built into you."

THE POST MAN strolled onto the worn path. "Nice day for a walk, eh, Mr. Berk?"

"Splendid," he replied. "Tell me, is there any reason why you shouldn't walk in *that* direction?" He pointed directly at the spaceship.

The old man removed the pipe from his mouth and regarded Edmonds carefully. "A man can't walk through solid rock."

Martha had often called the ship a rock. "It's a rock, is it? Has it been here long?"

"It's always been here. Leastways, it was here when I was a tyke, a small boy."

"You were *never* a small boy, Post Man."

"Mr. Berk, you shouldn't ought to say things like that. Something might."

"Look," Edmonds interrupted. "Look over there. What is it? What can it be?"

"You shouldn't ought to see things you shouldn't ought to see." the Post Man began ominously, turning to investigate.

Edmonds found a stone, picked it up and went up behind the Post Man. He smashed in the back of the Post Man's head with the jagged stone. There was blood

and bones and brains and wires.

The old man turned, fingers flexing at the ends of his gray uniform sleeves. "Something mighty painful might happen to you, Mr. Berk, for doing a—a thing—like..."

He took one step, two steps, then ran down and fell over. He was dead.

Edmonds looked up at the spaceship. There was no sign of movement, no response. The ship was ignoring him. It was not ready for the next phase of his conversation.

"I'll prove I'm a man," he called out wildly. "I'll prove I'm your master!"

THE OTHERS always obeyed him. The Post Man had been the symbol of authority. With him gone, the simple morons would obey Berk Edmonds without question.

He got in his big Caddy and rounded them up. Martha, George and Gloria, Miss Chirpley, and he went into Mr. Dark's house and found that Mr. Dark wasn't a transformed humanoid or even a robot, just a cut-out from a plastic sheet with electric eyes,

moving on a fixed track around his darkened house. After that, he drove over to the office and picked up Miss Jorgensen. She was mechanical but he found she still obeyed him. He drove them all out to the spaceship.

After he lined them up, he told them what he wanted them to do.

"I want you all," he said, "to dig a deep ditch around this big—rock. I want you to dig it as deep and as wide as you can. We don't have shovels so you will have to use your hands."

"Say," George bellowed, "that's a real winner of an idea, eh, Gang?"

"You always think of such clever games, dear," Martha simpered.

They dug. With their greater strength, in hours the ditch was deep enough and wide enough.

He chose Miss Jorgensen for the next stop. Somehow he felt better about using her—but not much.

"Miss Jorgensen, I want you now to start digging under the—rock."

"Yes, sir," she said crisply,

adjusting her harlequin glasses with a clay-reddened hand. "Shall I do it in a manner like so? Is this satisfactory, sir?"

"Yes, Miss Jorgensen, that will do nicely."

Twenty minutes later, the spaceship tilted precariously, hung for a long breath, then crushed Miss Jorgensen soundlessly.

AT THE FIRST spark of sun-bright fire, he yelled "Back!" to the creatures, but it was unnecessary. A short blast of rocket power was sufficient to right the spacer and level the ground on which it stood.

But now the ship was in a depression. The cooling metal ores in the ground glazed and cast images in reflection. There were a hundred, a thousand mirrors reflecting so many pictures of the spaceship. Distorted pictures, long, thick, squat, big, small, undistorted perfect facsimiles.

The radar antennas of the ship quivered. They were picking up echoes of the ship itself. Suddenly, the whole ship shuddered convulsively.

I think I know what it is,

Edmonds realized. *I think I do.*

The Converter ship had just become aware of its own existence.

Right now it was going through the 'I *think, therefore I am* stage.

He had not been able to kill it in a fall—he had only managed to give the thing birth.

High above him, a video lens whirled and he felt reflected sunlight in his eyes. The ship was studying him again.

Edmonds was blinded by a brighter flash of light.

This was death, destruction. He had only managed to raise the Converter from its apathy enough to irritate it into destroying him.

Yes, he had managed to raise the ship.

It was at about five hundred feet now, trailing a star of light; now it was a mote, now gone.

Edmonds was alone on this planet, whose location he had never known, with a bunch of reconditioned humanoids.

That was the way it had to be when the Converter had become aware of its own existence.

THE CONVERTER had realized it was controlling a human being, a basic violation of its performance programming.

Perhaps it had known that Edmonds was an Earthman for some time, but it did not realize that its natural function of planet conditioning had constituted unnatural control of a man.

Its function was only an inevitable facet of Nature, of Order, of Cause and Effect. before it discovered it was a *thing* itself, a being with volition and control.

It *had* to leave, and leave a man free.

"I proved my point," he said to himself. "A cybernetic-operated Converter can't replace an explorer." It hadn't solved the problem of this planet—it had only run away from it. And it knew it had failed. It wasn't programmed to return a failure. Would it then return at all? Would it try again on another planet to recondition it to Earthnorm and could it succeed even once on its own?

Edmonds was interested, because unless the spaceship *did* return no one would ever know where he was. And how many milleniums would it be before someone found this mote among the stars by sheer chance?

There would be other explorers; they wouldn't be completely replaced, but it looked like the end for him.

Now he couldn't escape the society he disliked so thoroughly. But at least here he could shape that society into something he liked better. It might even serve as an example to human colonists who might come *if* the World-Converter did return to Earth.

Edmonds was no longer an explorer. He was about to become a cultural leader, a—he chewed the word and finally swallowed it—a politician.

"Come on" he called to his people. "We're going home and tote the Tri-Di sets down into the basement play rooms."

"Say, that's a real winner of an idea, Berk," George said enthusiastically.





Editorial

WHO'S TO BLAME?

NOT TOO long ago, a letter appeared in *Science Fiction Times* (a news-sheet published by an old-time fan and lover of science fiction, Jimmy Taurasi) complaining about the absence of fan departments in the science fiction magazines. Why aren't the science fiction magazines using fan news and fan-slanted departments any more? the letter-writer wanted to know.

It isn't the first time I've come across such a complaint; numerous oldtimers have asked me the same question. And I counter this question with a question of my own: *Why should they?* That

is the question the fans should have asked first. Why should science fiction magazines run departments slanted toward the science fiction fans, and their activities and special interests? Why have various science fiction magazines, *Science Fiction Stories* among them, used such material in the past? Why did we stop?

And, most important of all, what part have the fans themselves played in all this?

LET'S TAKE a look into the past of science fiction magazines and what has be-

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to err is inhuman

by Marion

Zimmer Bradley

illustrated by Emsb

...and the man who made a mistake thereby forfeited his humanity—just as if he'd told a lie, which only the perverted would do. Thus, the invader scouts were expected to return with a true and accurate report about Earth...

AN OPAQUE blot against the colorless glare of eternal sunlight, the ship of the R'rin circled silently in free orbit, just beyond the topmost limits of atmosphere. Hundreds of miles below, a small spinning planet trailed its cone of shadow, oblivious to the menace overhead.

Inside the ship, in the lounge common to the crew, two men sprawled on cushioned couches,

comfortable under synthetic gravity, their capable bodies carelessly disposed in attitudes of relaxation. And yet, a careful observer could have noticed a slight, tense constraint that gave the lie to their superficial ease.

Ostensibly they ignored one another. The eyes of one were fastened on a small viewing-screen, while the other fingered the intricate links of a shim-



mery, semi-invisible metal puzzle. At length the man with the puzzle stretched long legs and arms, and inquired, with an elaborate yawn, "What's the Truth from the rest of the fleet, Alath?"

HIS COMPANION turned away from the screen. "Not much," he said, "Two ships have been destroyed in the fighting in the Fifth Sector, near. " he named a star at the edge of the Galaxy, "...and aboard the *Star of Home*, Captain Thillan has been replaced."

"Replaced?" questioned the first.

"Degraded," Alath explained briefly, and the other, whose name was Ketil, sighed. "I knew Thillan at the Academy. I never thought him very stable. Which reminds me," he drew himself upright, discarding his puzzle, "I suppose I ought to take another look at the-former-Narth."

"Poor fellow," Alath murmured. "I'll come along, if you don't mind."

"All right." Ketil covered a yawn with his hand. The men,

leaving the lounge, strolled down a corridor along the central axis of the ship; at the far end of the living-quarters, a steel grating barred further progress, and Ketil, sliding aside a moving panel, peered cautiously through the opening.

The room behind the grating was carefully padded with foam-soft material, but was bare of any further furnishing, other than rude sanitary conveniences. Naked on the padding, a man sprawled in an attitude of exhaustion and despair; but as he caught sight of the two regarding him through the opening, he sprang up, and his features contorted themselves into a horrible travesty of humanity.

"Alath...! Ketil!" His voice held supplication, "Let me out of here, get me out, do something! You're my friends, you'll listen to me, won't you? I didn't—I'm not what they said—I made a mistake, I tell you. I counted wrong, it was a slip of the tongue..."

Ketil stepped backward, his lip curling up in instinctive distaste, but Alath's voice was

compassionate. "Hold on, old fellow, hold on. Perhaps when we're back in Galactic Center..."

"Alath," the man in the cell implored, "You don't believe..."

"*Belief* has nothing to do with it," said Alath primly, recoiling somewhat from the prisoner, who leaped forward, seizing the bars, clutching and rattling them with desperate force. Narth's voice was a hoarse furnace of blistering hate. "Just wait! Just wait, just *wait*," he threatened. "Some day it will happen to you! Some day you'll know..."

KETIL PUT a hand on Alath's shoulder. "Come along," he advised, "We can't help him, Alath, and I'm supposed to make sure no one hangs around the Cells."

"Just one minute—Narth, are you comfortable, old man? Getting enough to eat? Is there anything I can..."

Narth spat a furious obscenity, and both men shuddered. Alath sighed as Ketil slid the aperture closed again. "Poor fellow," he repeated.

"Poor fellow, nothing," Ketil snorted, "why in the name of the blazing radioactive suns of Thetti did he have to crack up *now*, when we're already so short-handed that it hurts to think of what might happen if we're ordered to attack that ball of dirt down there!"

"We *are* shorthanded," Alath admitted, "the whole fleet is short-handed. But I do feel sorry for Narth—do you think we will attack the planet, Ketil?"

"No telling, until the other scout ships get back," Ketil grunted, "but I don't know why we shouldn't. When I took the pickup down, I didn't see any evidence that they were anything more than a low-grade technological society. By all appearances, they're still running on atomics. No sign of photon-converters anywhere. No spaceports. Of course, I didn't land, or even go down under the cloud layer." He broke off, aware that he was being diverted from the original topic. "As for Narth," he grimaced "he's just a pervert like any other pervert, and I wouldn't waste

sympathy on him. You didn't *hear* it, Alath. I was there when he spoke the. . ." his voice dropped to a hollow mutter, "...the un-Truth!"

ALATH LOOKED at the rivets in the floor, as Ketil went on, "I was there when he said—said it deliberately, Alath—that there were ten unopened rations-bins in the storage, when we'd counted eleven together!"

"He may not have seen the other one," Alath suggested without enthusiasm.

"You psychologists!" Ketil snapped, "You can always find an excuse to defend any kind of filth, can't you? You *know*..."

"I know," Alath said hastily, "To err is inhuman. Truth distinguishes the Human. Still, there is a chance..."

"All your fancy words can't make it anything but perversion," Ketil said with an uncompromising frown.

"Still, the punishment seems cruel," mused Alath, as they returned to the common lounge.

"Cruel, but necessary," Ke-

til said. He picked up his puzzle and slid it back and forth in his hands for a few seconds, then flung it away. He paced the lounge for minutes, then turned to Alath, as if defending his own stand. "You must understand me, Alath," he pleaded, "I liked North—what *was* North—too! Humanity! he's been my bunkmate for five trips! That's one reason I'm so repelled—how would you feel if you discovered you'd been bunking with a pervert who embraced un-Truth?"

ALATH BENT and fiddled with a dial on the viewing-screen before he answered, slowly, "Ketil, no one but a licensed psych-prob can prove it was Perversion. It may have been merely Error. Yes, I know..." he forestalled Ketil's interruption with a patient gesture, "...to err is inhuman, and it's quite true that North—the-former-North," he corrected himself—"has forfeited his humanity, whether error *or* perversion. Still, you have no right to call him a pervert before a psych-prob verifies his intent, Ketil. And to

deny that I pity him would be un-Truth!"

Ketil bowed his head. "To your Truth," he said in the formal phrase, "your privilege, Alath." He turned away, took up his puzzle again, then flung it petulantly away. "Get another newsreel," he snapped, "how can we amuse ourselves in this fallible old hulk?"

Alath did not turn or look at him. "Do it yourself," he retorted; "I dislike you now! To your Truth!" and he slammed out of the lounge.

Ketil remained behind, not turning on the viewing-screen, but his hands were not steady, and spurting anger surged up in him. He tried to pull himself together. Humanity! this waiting, waiting, waiting for attack was getting on his nerves! He must be on the very edge of a crackup himself, if he could be so furious at Alath's Truth! But the fact remained that he and Alath had been friends for a long time, too; and the cold statement of dislike hurt him like a blow.

H E OUGHT to follow Alath and make up the quarrel.

It was his own fault. He'd insisted on talking about NARTH; Alath *had* tried to change the subject. It wasn't any wonder if Alath was nervous and edgy, either; the fleet *was* alarmingly short-handed. Ketil knew that much in spite of the censorship; and Alath, as junior psychologist—the only licensed Psych-prob in the Fleet had been Degraded last year—presumably had access to the top-Secret Fallibility Statistics, which were kept restricted for reasons of morale.

Yes; he owed Alath an apology. But Humanity! that would come dangerously close to perversion. He had spoken Truth to Alath and if he took it back now it would be un-Truth. *but had* he spoken truth when he said he did not pity NARTH? Shaking, Ketil collapsed, rather than sat, into the closest seat, perilously close to hysteria. He was coming to pieces—he was going insane—his mouth trembled as he tried to repeat the First Truth:

"Humanity is infallible. To doubt the infallibility of Humanity is inhuman. To state

that man is fallible is error, and to err is inhuman. Therefore the fallible man can be proven, by logical demonstration, not to be a Man at all."

Yes; even if Narth had not deliberately perverted Truth, he had proven himself fallible and therefore forfeited his claim to be called human. But still.

WITH A FURIOUS gesture, Ketil snapped on the viewing-screen, then turned it out again. He was tired of newsreels; tired of puzzles. He had read all the fact-accumulation micros on board, and he was weary to death of this waiting! The presence of Narth—naked and insane in his cell—was un-nerving, too; hating himself for a superstitious fool, Ketil made an obsolete gesture toward his lips and whispered half-aloud "*Guard us from inhuman error, O Greatest Truth...*"

Blazing space! where was Alath? *He would not stay alone in here!* Down at the end of the corridor, Narth was weeping aloud in great blubbery sobs, his hold on reason

quite loosed; it prompted Ketil to the superstitious gesture again, but instead he straightened his back and bellowed "Alath!"

Alath thrust his head out of the bunk-cubby he shared with Luss—now absent on the scouting mission—and Ketil said "Come in here!"

Alath scowled. "Is that an expression-of-a-wish, or is it an order?" he inquired stiffly.

Ketil looked at the floor. "It's an expression-of-a-wish," he mumbled. "I regret making you angry. I spoke in my Truth, but I don't like to be alone and I dislike your anger."

"To your Truth," Alath said politely, but added nothing to the formal phrase. Then; advancing into the lounge, he said—still, Ketil noticed, not answering—"I sighted one of the scout ships. Soon we should know whether an attack is practical."

ONE AFTER another, the miniature reconnaissance ships matched velocities with the mother ship, and the crew of the R'rin ship, after the

briefest of intervals for necessary refreshment, gathered in the common lounge.

Ketil—who had been the first to return, having had the simplest mission—pulled himself together and related what he had seen in the small detector ship, repeating what he had told Alath. "The planet is rich," he added. "Plenty of heavy minerals, no serious radioactivity, no oxygen-deterioration, no trace of previous exploitation. Low-order non-space civilization, presumably less than ten Galactic Aeons from savagery. Pending a report from the surfacing ships, my vote is definitely cast to summon the fleet and invade."

The captain, Rudan, hemmed and hawed. "Of course, you didn't go down to the surface," he mused. "Luss, you had the bio-detector scoutship. What did you find?"

"I didn't surface, either," Luss said. Alath's bunkmate, he was a burly, cheerful man past middle age, and now his mouth was curled up with faintly ribald humor. "First of all, I'll relieve the mind of our psychologist," he said, with a

pleasant nod. "The dominant race is human."

A shout of laughter went up all over the cabin at Alath's exaggerated look of chagrin; it was one of the few standing jokes that had survived the long cruise in space—the psychologist's desire to find a non-human intelligent race.

WHEN LUSS could speak with a straight face again, he went on. "Dirty jokes aside," he said, "the bio-detectors confirm Ketil's report; no sign of photon conversion. I won't give you technical details now, but I have soil, air, water and protoplasm samples. Gravity is a bit low. The atmosphere is high in oxygen; pending a professional report from Alath, I'd hazard a careful guess that the civilization would be mildly euphoric, potentially unstable, with a high level of intuitive intelligence and a very low level of decadent or primitive morality."

Rudan nodded, slowly and carefully. "A cautious report," he said mildly, "but a satisfactory one. Still, everything depends on the report from the surface crew."

Ketil frowned with impatience; Rudan always staged this slow, carefully impressive, suspenseful build-up. Were they, or weren't they, going to invade? That was what was important!

"Fordill," Rudan said, "You went down to the surface with the mission of securing artifacts. Did you. . ."

Fordill nodded. He was a cocky young man, to whom dangerous missions were the breath of life, but he looked a little subdued, a little pallid.

"Captain," he said, "With your permission—I'm afraid we won't be able to invade."

RUDAN SCOWLED and looked with curt impatience at Fordill, but Ketil, watching, knew that Fordill was enjoying this, even more than Rudan. He would tell his story in his own way, and he wouldn't be hurried.

"We had no trouble in landing," Fordill reported, "and without attracting any undue attention, we made our way to what appeared to be a city. . ." then, to everybody's astonishment, Fordill suddenly sighed,

broke off, and held out a thin bundle of sheets, loosely bound together. "Here, Captain, look at these," he said tiredly, "We managed to secure some of what appear to be a primitive form of fact-accumulators; they resemble the old fact-books which predated the modern micros."

Rudan held the alien artifacts limply in his hand. Ketil could see, from where he was, that they were covered with pictures and fine alien printing. Fordill spoke with only a shadow of his usual cocky self. "Naturally, without report from Luss and Ketil, we didn't dare to stay down too long. You could almost say that we grabbed these artifacts and ran. But I'm afraid they speak for themselves."

Rudan, in bewilderment, fingered the thin pages. He turned and caught Ketil's eye. "Here," he said. "You're our technical expert—what is this stuff?"

Ketil leaned over the captain's shoulder and peered closely at one of the fact-books. "I believe it's a plastic preparation of some pulped

wood-fabric. Their civilization can't be at a very high level, or they wouldn't be using anything as fragile as this for fact-accumulation." He shredded the edge of a page between his fingers.

"Their civilization is higher than it appears," warned Fordill. "Don't take a chance on Error, Ketil."

ALATH TOOK one of the fact-books from the Captain. "With your permission," he said, and riffled the pages. "Pity we can't invade," he muttered, just loud enough for the rest of the crew to hear, "Look at these women! Luss, you were quite right—the place is biologically favorable!"

"Let me see..." Luss bent to look, and emitted a sharp whistle at the pictures on the pulp-wood stuff. "I'd give a sizable fraction of my pay," he said, "to be able to inspect the women of this planet!"

"I wouldn't stop at inspecting," Ketil jeered, relieved at the change in conversation. But Luss, with a scientist's preoccupation, was still puzzling over the painted likeness-

es. "They are quite—quite emphatically super-mammals," he remarked pedantically, "I shall regret it if we cannot explore this planet at greater length."

"If you've quite finished," Fordill reproached, and Luss fell into an embarrassed silence, handing the booklet back to the Captain.

"I was about to state the reason," Fordill said dully, "why an invasion is impractical." He extended three or four more booklets, each one as large as two hands, and about a finger's thickness. "Look at these, Captain."

RUDAN TOOK the pulp-wood artifacts and his lips pursed in a soundless whistle. His eyebrows went up, then he slid his tongue over his lips. "All right, Alath," he said wearily, "You have the last laugh, it seems. Here's your nonhuman race."

Luss leaned over Alath's shoulder, and the others, big-eyed, crowded around. The painting portrayed, in the smeared flat style of a primitive race, a monster; four-armed, scaly, equipped with an

unfamiliar weapon. A bosomy girl, scantily-clad, lolled against the monster's sheltering bulk. Alath's breath was a sibilant whistle. "Impossible!" he murmured.

"Evidently, they have non-human allies," Luss murmured.

"We'd be insane to invade a planet like this," the Captain said, and the sound of defeat was already in his voice. "Look at this!" He held out the second booklet. It portrayed a battle in deep space on the outermost sheet. Ships of a pattern the R'rin had never seen, battled with ships of a design slightly more conventional. In fact, allowing for primitive lack of artistic skill, they might have been R'rin ships. Rudan nodded.

"Look at these, Ketil," he said. "They've been invaded before. They have ships—better than ours; certainly they work on an entirely new principle.— If they were conventionally fuelled by any known means, that design simply wouldn't fly space. They're—they're—why, nothing like that would ever get out of atmosphere unless it was founded

on some principle so far in advance of ours that we can't even comprehend it! And look at the weapons they're using. " He flipped to an inside page, of thinner, more crumbly pulp-fabric. "It's some kind of disintegrator—that ship is breaking up in space. And the very principle of disintegration has baffled *our* scientists for more Galactic Aeons than I like to think about!"

THE R'RIN crew stood stunned before the possibilities.

"We can't invade," Rudan sighed at last, "not possibly. Why, these people must be the center of a great Empire! We knew it must come some day—another great civilization in space—but I wish I weren't the one to find it!"

Luss said wistfully, eying the painted woman, "Shouldn't we try to make contact, Captain? Think of the advancement to science..."

"No," snapped Rudan, "We don't dare! You know the Law as well as I do—when we meet a civilization technologically better than ours, we run! We

can't risk meeting a non-human race on the terms of having attacked or invaded their protectorates! If these people have non-human allies, we leave them alone! Besides—could we stand up against disintegrators?"

KETIL was frowning over the picture. "Impossible," he murmured again. *Disintegrators!* He found it incredi-

ble. Alath heard him, gave him a secret look, then spoke:

"Captain, in respect for your Truth, I have an idea." He pointed to the booklet; then, crossing the lounge, picked up a fact-micro from the ship's library and slipped it into the enlarger which projected it on the wall. It was one of the Experimental Institute's publications, and contained the familiar warning, in huge, green, danger-sign letters;

WARNING!

Material contained herein is not Factual;
By special permission, theoretical material
not yet proven is included as a mental
recreation and exercise.
Not to be sold to Minors!

"Well?" Rudan asked roughly.

"Captain, Ketil said that the civilization appeared low-grade, with a very early technology. Isn't it possible that these fact-accumulators might be non-factual?"

Rudan barely considered it. "If it was in semantic symbols, I'd say *just* possible. But these are pictures. Pictures are as infallible as Humanity, Alath.

You can't draw a picture of something that doesn't exist. Why, my boy, what would you copy from?"

"From a. . . Alath flushed and said in a low voice, "from an aberrant dream?"

THE CAPTAIN chuckled. "My word, but that's ingenious," he said, in a tone that deepened Alath's flush and made Ketil, who had ad-

mired Alath's theory, squirm. "You think Fordill picked up a bunch of psychologist's case-books? No—no, those aren't fantasies. Look at the details on the nonhuman. Look at the mechanical details on the spaceships."

Alath put down the micro, but persisted, "The Experimental Institute has a non-factual theory, that there might be a race of telepaths. . ."

"So?" Rudan was impatient now.

"So, sir, they might not consider it a—a perversion to speak an un-Truth, because they could read one another's minds. So they would know when they were telling the truth and when they weren't, and..." Alath became conscious of Rudan's cold stare, and finished with flustered desperation, "Un-Truth might be a sort of recreation; no one would take it seriously. . ."

The atmosphere in the common lounge was definitely stiffer, and even Luss edged a step or two away from Alath. "Captain..." Alath said desperately.

Then, to everybody's relief, Rudan chuckled. "Alath, you're young," he said, then added with definite reproof, "The Experimental Institute comes dangerously near to circulating perverted smut, at times. I suggest that in future, you confine your studies to more orthodox Truthful sources, until you are old enough to judge more carefully."

ALATH BIT his lip, and insisted.

"Indulge me as a psychologist," he said. "Luss remarked that due to the high oxygen content of the atmosphere, he would theorize a euphoric civilization, with a very low and decadent morality. Perhaps the planet is aberrant?"

"A whole planet of perverts? Impossible!" Rudan snorted, half-way between anger and laughter. "There's never been such a thing in the Galaxy! If they didn't respect Truth, they couldn't be an intelligent race—they'd be a race of beasts! And now, if you don't mind—" and he sounded really angry now—"we'll get off such disgusting topics!"

Crushed, but carefully not looking at the Captain, Alath put the micro away. But Ketil, mentally reviewing his trip in the little scouting pickup, could not accept this. He lingered. "Captain," he said urgently, "Listen to me. I'm *sure* there weren't any spaceports! There can't be any nonhuman races! Ask Luss! It's—it's biologically impossible!"

But Luss would not meet Ketil's imploring glance, and Rudan's eyes were cold and small in his face. "Your words, Ketil, reflect on my infallibility," the Captain rasped, "In view of the shorthandedness of the ship, and of the fleet in general, I will overlook them—until we return to R'rin! Then I shall hold you to account for them!" He turned on his heel, ordering as he went, "Plot a course to rejoin the fleet and make for R'rin!"

KETIL LET his knees go limp and sank into a chair. Alath, about to leave the lounge for his quarters, bent for an instant and advised in a murmur "You'd better do what he said..." and Ketil, trem-

bling with reaction and near to hysteria, could not escape the look of mingled triumph and commiseration in Alath's eyes. Then he felt Alath's friendly arm around his shoulders, and heard the young psychologist's smooth voice, raised to recall Rudan.

"Captain, I have authority to relieve a man from duty," he said gently. "Send some one else to plot the course. I've been aboard ship with Ketil for several revolutions while you were out on scout, and I'm convinced that he is mildly neurotic and needs rest and treatment, or—" his nails bit sharply into Ketil's flesh and the words were a cue and a rebuke—"or he'll end up where *the-former-Narth is!*"

"Fordill, take over Ketil's duty till further notice," Rudan said, not paying much attention. "Ketil, confined to cabin at Alath's discretion," and he went out of the lounge.

Supported by Alath's arm, Ketil reeled toward his bunk-cubby. Down in his beast-cell at the end of the corridor, Narth raised a shrill howl of despair.

WHICH ONE would finish the voyage in that cell with NARTH? Himself or Rudan? They couldn't both be right. Humanity was infallible...either Rudan or himself was infallible...Ketil, less flexible than the cynical young Alath, shuddered with the first premonitory tremors of incipient insanity, knowing that for the rest of his life he would be concealing, concealing, hiding his disbelief in someone's infallibility, including his own...or end in a cell like NARTH's...

He collapsed, shuddering, into his bunk. The great ship of the R'rin trembled noise-

lessly, with a great shake and shudder of drive units, and turned her back on invincible Earth.

Two hundred miles below, a newsdealer in Denver, checking his stock at the end of a busy day, spewed a flood of indecorous language at the so-and-sos who'd steal magazines right off a rack so's a body couldn't make a decent living. "Must be teen-age boys," he grumbled, "darn" juvenile delinquents! Always stealing the same stuff! Magazines with nekkid women in 'em, and that crazy science-fiction junk!"

Many stories have been written about human beings on the Moon — yet, none have really begun to describe what you and I would see in the sky if we were on the Moon. Here is a definitive article, showing that the facts — even what we know of them from this planet — far outshine fiction!

You Are There — On the Moon!
in ISAAC ASIMOV'S latest

"Point of View" article

Point of View: The Moon

*it's among
the many
features of
the August*

**FUTURE
SCIENCE FICTION**

*Now on
sale at
all stands*

**eye
of the
beholder**

by Robert
Silverberg

Art dealers, art phonies, and struggling artists alike were agog when the being from Paradilla revealed his mission. He was here to select some of Earth's masterpieces for the art-collection of His Altitude, the Emperor of Paradilla — at fabulous prices!

THE ALIEN landed at New York Spaceport on the fifth of August, 2281, a blisteringly hot day despite the best efforts of the Weather Control Bureau. The alien, of course, did not care about the weather, encased as he was in a mobile biotic unit. He simply rolled down the spaceship's ramp into the cluster of eager reporters who had been waiting ever since learning that a visitor from distant Paradilla was en route to Earth.

To the sweating newsmen, the Paradillan looked like a gleaming black metallic pear five feet high, with a ring of perceptor lenses circling the upper part of its body; three multiply-jointed arms projecting beneath those; and a speaker grid set square in the widest part of the pear. Ball-bearing gliders provided mobility. Within the sealed unit lived the Paradillan, eighty pounds of beady-eyed green lemuroid, breathing its corrosive atmosphere of hydrogen sulfide and shimmering pleasantly at a temperature of 680 degrees Kelvin.

"Why have you come to

Earth?" demanded an eager wire-service man.

The voder output of the alien's biotic unit replied blandly, "To gratify the wish of His Altitude Naribullah Zorz, Elevated Mightiness of Imperial Paradilla. His Altitude desires to form a collection of Terran paintings. He has established a credit of several million dollars with reputable Terran banking firms, to facilitate purchase of the desired works of art."

"Give us some idea of what you're looking for!"

"I seek the pinnacle of Terran artistic achievement," said the Paradillan. "I will stint no expense in my search."

PORTABLE stenotypes clatteringly recorded the alien's words. Minutes later, in the press room of the spaceport, a dozen reporters hastily pounded out their stories. After all, a visit from a Paradillan was *news*. Paradilla was six hundred thousand light-years from Earth: nine weeks even by warpdrive travel. Only a handful of intrepid Earthmen had ever visited the planet; no more than a dozen Para-

dillans had bothered to journey to Earth in the century since Terra had become an interstellar power.

But it was known that Paradilla was the center of commerce in its particular galaxy—a fabulously rich world where even the paupers were wealthy. Jokes about Paradillan trillionaires and their odd tastes were standard network fare. If a Paradillan had come to Earth to buy paintings for His Altitude, it meant that a good bit of cash was going to be thrown about.

The news broke in the late afternoon editions of the telefax sheets. Most papers treated it lightly: **PICASSO FOR PARADILLA**, headlined the *Globe*, while the *Transworld* snickered, **ARTY ALIEN ARRIVES, HERE TO PICK PIX FOR PARADILLA**.

IN THE AIR-conditioned offices of Vandeventer Sateen, whose plush gallery was a fashionable highlight of New York's famed Eleventh Avenue, the arrival of the alien aroused considerable interest.

Mr. Sateen himself, an ele-

gant little man of impeccable taste, rarely troubled to read the 'fax-sheets. But one of his assistants made a point of keeping abreast of the news, and it was he who disturbed the art dealer's negotiations via tridim with an elderly and indigent Yorkshire noblewoman by saying, "Could you look at this, sir?"

Without losing a syllable of his transatlantic conversation, Mr. Sateen skimmed the telefax clipping. Nodding, he deftly brought the negotiations to a close with an offer that met immediate acceptance. As Lady Bracknell faded from the screen, Mr. Sateen said crisply, "Very good. Arrange an appointment with this Paradillan at once. No, I'll call him myself!"

Far across the city, in the dilapidated and picturesque Park Avenue district, an equally dapper but far less respectable person was digesting the *Globe* article with care. He was Pierre d'Entendre, formerly of Marseilles and points north, a connoisseur of forgeries, imitations, stolen goods,

and other illegitimacies of the world of art. d'Entendre stroked his beard thoughtfully, eyeing the bogus Brueghel and the spurious Seurat that currently decorated his peeling walls. Perhaps some business could be done with this well-heeled extraterrestrial, he thought. Smiling, he reached for the visiphone.

While at the same time, across the river in Brooklyn, a young painter of the hyperrealist school was feeling an unfamiliar tingle of hope. For once he could stop fretting about the squalling of his two small, hungry children and could ignore the accusing glares of his unhappy wife. Lester Martin laughed out loud.

"What's so funny?" Beth Martin asked sourly.

"Good news, for once. There's a Paradillan here looking to buy Terran paintings. And you know how much dough those guys are supposed to have!"

Beth sighed, scowling at the unframed canvasses stacked near their infant son's playpen. "So?"

"So?" Martin repeated. "So I'm going to see that Paradillan, that's what! So I'm going to sell him my paintings!"

"You—sell him your paintings?" Beth laughed icily. "You've been painting nine years without a sale, Rembrandt. And now—now..."

"Don't you have any faith in me?"

"Do you want me to answer that?"

Lester Martin shrugged. "You wait and see, Beth. Just you wait and see."

THE PARADILLAN was quartered at an expensive hotel in metropolitan Nyack, as per arrangements made in advance by the Bureau of Extraterrestrial Welfare, which took care of such matters for arriving aliens. Since he and his mobile biotic unit together weighed close to five hundred pounds, he received a special topfloor suite with reinforced flooring, reserved for such cases.

The suite was luxurious: five large rooms, each with individual sealing bulkheads should the alien guest care to

introduce his own atmosphere. But the Paradillan had no such intention. He was perfectly comfortable in the womb-like security of his biotic unit, and did not plan to have the hermetic seal broken until he had returned to his home world. Within the mobile unit he had facilities for exercise, a food synthesizer, entertainment tapes, and a flawless atmospheric circulating system. It was like carrying a bit of Paradilla with him.

NO MORE than half an hour after the first telefax accounts of the Paradillan's arrival hit the streets, the visiphone calls began to come in.

The Paradillan had some slight difficulty operating the phone with his arm-extensors, but he got the knack of it fast enough. The screen brightened and his perceptor pickups showed him an Earthman's face. The Earthman had little hair on his head, and wore red velvet garments that bothered the Paradillan's sense of texture.

"Yes?" the alien inquired.

"Ah—good afternoon, sir."

The Earthman's voice was soft and well-modulated. "I am Vandeventer Sateen, director of Sateen Galleries."

"Yes," said the alien in a neutral tone.

"Of course, I don't imagine that the reputation of our house will be familiar to one who had journeyed such an unimaginable distance, but. "

"I've heard of you," the Paradillan said shortly.

"Ah—certainly! I should have known that one to whom so important a mission has been entrusted would be familiar with every detail of his task. I understand you wish to take to your home world examples of Terra's finest artistic achievements, sir. May I humbly remark that the services of the Sateen Galleries are at your disposal during the length of your stay on our planet?"

"Good of you," commented the alien.

MR. SATEEN continued smoothly, "Your acceptance of our guidance honors us beyond measure, good sir. Would it be considered pre-

sumptuous if I were to add that at present we are capable of supplying you with a most rarefied selection of Old Masters: Matisse, van Gogh, El Greco, Pollock, Renoir, Ingres, virtually every style, every period."

"How comprehensive," rumbled the expressionless voder voice of the Paradillan.

"May we prepare our gallery for a private inspection by yourself?" Mr. Sateen asked. "We will place ourselves at your complete disposal at a moment's notice."

The Paradillan was silent a brief while. He said finally, "What about tomorrow?"

Mr. Sateen looked momentarily disconcerted, but recovered quickly. "Tomorrow? Of course, if you so wish..."

"At 0500 hours."

The art dealer elegantly moistened his lips and genteelly dabbed the perspiration from his forehead. The House of Sateen opened at 0900, never earlier. Mr. Sateen fought a brief inward battle. With only slight hesitation he said, "Very well. My staff and I will await your arrival. At 0500 hours."

HARDLY had the Paradillan broken the visiphone contact when the chime sounded again. The alien switched on the screen and peered at a darkly intense face which bore a pointed tuft of black hair on its

"I am so pleased to have made the contact with the so estimable guest from distant stars, M'sieu. Permit the introduction: Pierre d'Entendre, craving your attention."

The bearded Earthman spoke Terran with a strange nasal intonation that gave the Paradillan's translator-intake some trouble. "Please speak more clearly," the alien said flatly.

"A hundred thousand pardons, M'sieu! I am what they call the person displaced; my home lies across the sea and my tongue is poorly accustomed to this hard language. But I meander. Allow the directness: I deal in rarities of art. You are here to purchase. Perhaps we may do the business conjointly, and profit mutually thereby, n'est-ce pas?"

"I already have an appoint-

ment for tomorrow at the Sateen Galleries."

"Ah, yes, certainly, the estimable Sateen! So dignified, so fashionable, so—how shall we say?—expensive! See Sateen, by all means. But reserve the judgment, do not buy. Stay your hand until you have considered all resources. I perhaps can offer you more, aid you to serve your client more agreeably. For when is your visit with Sateen?"

"0500 hours."

"0500—you make the joke! Surely Sateen will not do business at..."

"0500 hours."

d'Entendre gulped audibly. "Indeed, M'sieu—M'sieu—I have not the name."

"Paradillans of my class do not bear names."

"Ah, so! Even then, M'sieu: may I extend to you my invitation to visit my humble establishment when you have left the Maison Sateen? Perhaps at 0900, and I shall display my treasures..."

"Very well."

"You have given me deepest pleasure, M'sieu. But—do me one small courtesy—come

alone, and in silence? I imply, invite not the gentlemen of the press. We shall deal better in privacy, yes?"

A GAIN THE screen blanked, after some moments of d'Entendre's effusive goodbyes. But it did not remain blank long. The calls flooded in. Curators of fifty museums longed to offer advice without charge to the alien. Every art dealer in the world seemed anxious to sell paintings to the Paradillan. Some artists tried to arrange personal showings for him.

After midnight the calls diminished to a trickle, but it was not until 0300 hours that the phone remained silent for good. The Pardillan, having no need of sleep and tremendously enjoying the notoriety, remained by the phone even then, hoping for another call, but none came.

AT 0500 HOURS the gates of the House of Sateen opened and the Paradillan's quarter-ton biotic unit rolled ponderously in, leaving behind a scored spoor of tiny indenta-

tions in the deep-pile red carpet. Mr. Sateen, bleary-eyed at the unusual hour, deftly concealed his inward distress over the damage. The prestige of supplying art to His Altitude, the Elevated Mightiness of Imperial Paradilla, would more than make up for any slight losses. Besides, the insurance covered it.

"If you would come this way, kind sir," Mr. Sateen murmured, bowing and dancing genteelly round the metal bulk of the biotic unit. "Everything is prepared."

Within, the suave salesmen of the House of Sateen, all of them drawing extra pay for this early-morning duty, awaited the alien. Safely concealed upstairs lurked reporters from the major press services, waiting for word from Mr. Sateen; he had promised them news as soon as a deal was clinched.

The galleries were decked out with their finest. Mr. Sateen had seen to it that none but the best was on display. A sumptuous El Greco greeted the Paradillan in the Grand Gallery, flanked by a darkly melodramatic Rembrandt and

a small but exquisite Raphael madonna. Mr. Sateen launched into a dainty disquisition on the El Greco, tracing its history and leading gently toward the \$300,000 price-tag, when the Paradillan made a sudden comment about a Velasquez hung on the far wall. Mr. Sateen realized uncomfortably that the biotic unit had 360-degree vision.

Shifting gears rapidly, Mr. Sateen said, "Indeed, yes. A fine piece, formerly from the collection of Dr. and Mrs. Hiram Blumberg, who purchased it in 2253 from..."

"The frame is quite attractive," commented the Paradillan, its voder voice accenting *frame* ever so lightly.

MR. SATEEN took the hint. Neither the Velasquez nor the Rembrandt nor the Raphael nor even the El Greco pleased the alien's austere tastes. Mr. Sateen guided the Paradillan through a corridor into the Green Room. Here a Mondrian in stark white and red held the position of honor. Other notables of the 20th and 21st century were represented

as well: a sparkling Picasso, a playful Chagall, a moody Leeuwenhoek, an intricate Kandinsky, a delicate Klee.

The Paradillan's response was coolish. Undaunted, Mr. Sateen glided onward into the Red Room, with its glittering array of Byzantine painting and its impressive Duccio altarpiece. The impassive Paradillan merely remarked, "The color of the room distresses me."

Mr. Sateen manfully maintained his composure. He led the alien to the Octagonal Room, resplendent with Reynolds, Gainsborough, Turner, Copley; to the Prismatic Room, which displayed van Gogh, Renoir, Monet, Pissaro, Utrillo; to the Blue Room and Goya, Rubens, Tiepolo, van Eyck; to the Rococo Room and Fragonard, Watteau, Verne, Moreau.

And then the Paradillan had seen it all; no more remained. Still he had indicated no preference. Mr. Sateen, far too refined to press for a decision, danced attendance on the alien as he ushered him to the grand gate.

"It was an honor to have showed our collection to you," said the art dealer unctuously.

THE PARADILLAN replied, "The experience was valuable."

"May I venture to express the hope that we will hear from you shortly?"

"You will not hear from me," was the calmly blunt response. "In my opinion none of the works shown me today is of quality suitable to merit purchase for His Altitude's collection."

Mr. Sateen went glassy-eyed with shock. A flashbulb exploded and three reporters, waving stenotype microphones, popped from alcoves concealed by drapery.

"Would you repeat that statement for the press, please?"

"No! No!" Mr. Sateen cried. "This is an intolerable intrusion!"

The Paradillan said mildly, "In my opinion, none of the works shown me today is of quality suitable to merit purchase for His Altitude's collection."

Stenotypers clacked. More flashbulbs popped. Mr. Sateen's suave aides, no longer suave, hastily expelled the Fourth Estate. The Paradillan, ignored in the confusion, activated his biotic unit and rolled out of the Maison Sateen.

THE 0900 editions of most of the telefax sheets gave it a big play: OLD MASTERS BORE ARTY ALIEN, said *Transworld*; PARADILLAN SNEERS AT REMBRANDT, VAN GOGH, trumpeted the *Globe*. Pierre d'Entendre smiled obliquely at the headlines spread out on his imitation Louis Quatorze table and bowed to his unusual guest.

"They have made the mistake," d'Entendre chuckled. "It is not the artists you scoff; it is the foolishly inflated prices of M. Sateen. Now, this treasurable Manet, mon ami, be good enough to regard it. M. Sateen would ask a hundred thousand. But I, I have no plush establishment to maintain" —he gestured grandiosely at the seedy apartment —"and I have the, how you say, inside contacts. His Alti-

tude may have this gem for a trifle. Twenty-five thousand!"

The Paradillan's perceptors focussed on the painting. After a moment the alien said, "This Manet—he painted in the 19th Century of Terran reckoning?"

"But of course!"

"Plainly this painting can be no more than ten years old."

d'Entendre reddened. "An impossibility! It dates from 1873, easily! Four hundred years, mon ami, not a mere ten!"

THE PARADILLAN said, "I am examining the texture of the paint and the weaving of the canvas. My perceptors are infallible. The painting is less than ten years old."

"But—but—oh, ten thousand pardons!" d'Entendre exclaimed, whisking the Manet out of sight. "An error, M'sieu! The work is a copy, done by a young friend of mine, a most promising beginner. In forgetful error did I offer it to you! But let us examine the fineness of this Picasso, in the cubist manner, an

undoubted 20th Century masterwork, the property of His Altitude for a paltry forty thousand!"

"The painting is 20th Century," the Paradillan agreed after a brief inspection. d'Entendre sighed in relief. "But," went on the alien, "It is unsigned. And it bears no recognizable Picasso traits. You err again, M. d'Entendre."

"Indeed, a mistake, a mistake—I beg forgiveness," the eager entrepreneur stammered. "See, I inadvertently mislabelled it! The painting is by another. Ah—one Schwartz, I believe. Circa 1971. A valuable piece nonetheless, and for sale at a meager two thousand..."

"SECOND-RATERS do not interest me," declared the Paradillan coldly, and Schwartz hastily disappeared behind the meretricious Manet. d'Entendre produced another choice specimen, a carefully forged Vermeer. The alien dismissed it contemptuously. Imitation Titian and ersatz Caravaggio met with equal scorn. At length, despairing, d'Entendre was at the point of bring-

ing out his few genuine but worthless paintings when the Paradillan called the farce to a halt.

"Your paintings," the alien said, "are misrepresented, mislabelled, and miscreated. You have attempted fraud, sir. Can you deny this?"

"All right, so I can't! So the stuff *is* phony!" d'Entendre shouted, accent and inflection melting under the stress. "What of it? Can the Elevated Mightiness tell the difference between cubist Picasso and cubist Schwartz? Look here, friend—you don't act like a dope. You know the score. I'll let you have all twenty of these paintings for two hundred thousand—ten grand apiece. You can tell the High Muckymuck that they're all genuine and you paid *fifty* grand apiece. You pocket eight hundred thousand cookies on the deal, and I'll get some dough too! How about it, huh?"

There was a glacial silence. The Paradillan said in booming tones, "Your proposal is beneath contempt. I must inform you that defrauding the

Elevated Mightiness is a crime punishable with loss of soul. I could not consider any such proposition. Good day, M. d'Entendre."

WITHOUT mentioning names, the Paradillan gave full details of his interview with d'Entendre to the press. His stock rose at once: an alien who could sneer at the House of Sateen might be merely arrogant, but one who could unmask a fraud deserved respect. He was shrewd, and Earthmen respected shrewdness.

The next three days were busy ones for the Paradillan. Without benefit of secretarial assistance he made and kept some forty appointments, visiting galleries and showrooms throughout the Western Hemisphere. He attracted tremendous attention wherever he went, partly because of the tanklike massiveness of the biotic unit, partly because of his frank and unconcealed scorn for the classic masterworks of Terran art.

He journeyed to Europe at the end of the week, followed

by a growing retinue of newsmen. The Paradillan was becoming bigger news each day. His patronizing words for the Mona Lisa stunned Paris; his casually devastating dismissal of the Sistine Chapel infuriated Italy. He made no purchases in Europe. After five days he returned to his Nyack hotel. He called a press conference for midnight; and, so fascinated had the public become with the haughty Paradillan, his suite was crowded with reporters as early as half past ten.

AT MIDNIGHT, the alien faced the grinding video cameras and said, "I have searched in vain for many days for a work of art suitable for the collection of the Elevated Mightiness of Imperial Paradilla. I have been approached by frauds and I have been shown the finest collections of Terran art that are to be seen. And I have bought nothing.

"Why? Because what I have seen is sterile, lifeless, without meaning or universal validity. I am greatly distressed by the

feebleness of what I have seen. Can Terran art lack all vitality, while Terrans themselves are among the most vigorous of the universe's peoples? It seems unlikely.

"Yet so the evidence of your art insists. But I have not abandoned hope. I have sworn not to return empty-handed to His Altitude. Ladies and gentlemen, I will not stop searching until my quest is satisfied! Thank you and good night."

The statement caused a global rumpus. Angry art-lovers demanded the immediate expulsion of the scornful extra-terrestrial; delighted philistines crowed that they had known the truth about art all along. The Paradillan made front pages everywhere. Throngs of the curious followed the gleaming biotic unit as it rolled from gallery to gallery.

Three weeks after his arrival on Earth, the Paradillan called another press conference. This time, though, it was not to be held at his hotel.

The address he gave was in Brooklyn—at the home of a hitherto unknown artist named Lester Martin.

WHEN THE reporters assembled duly at the Martin home, they found the Paradillan already there. Also present were Lester Martin—a stubby-faced young man of thirty, with the classically untidy hair and the mandatory black turtle-neck sweater of the struggling artist; Beth Martin—a weary, sad-faced girl of twenty-eight, with frizzly reddish hair and a sallow complexion; and their two children—Marcia, age four, and Vincent, age sixteen months, both unruly, underfed, and undisciplined.

The three-room apartment was shabby and dingy. Without air conditioning, the humidity was dreadful. Paintings in various states of completion were stacked everywhere: in the kitchen, in the bathtub, under the bed, behind the bookcases. A few hung framed on the walls.

Lester Martin looked tense, apprehensive, inwardly proud. His wife looked hopelessly confused. The yowling children simply looked defiant.

It was the Paradillan who did all the talking. Gesturing

to the reporters for silence, he said, "Many of you are aware of my considerable search for works of art I could purchase for the collection of His Altitude, Naribullah Zorz, Elevated Mightiness of Imperial Paradilla. At great expense I have examined the wares of Earth's merchants of art, weighed their offerings in the balance, found them wanting.

"But at last my quest has ended. Yesterday a young artist came to me, shyly humble, to show me a few of his works. I looked at them and asked to see more. He invited me to his home. I have examined his paintings with care. And, I happily announce, I find them worthy of the collection of His Altitude!"

The alien handed a slip of paper to Lester Martin and went on, "I have just paid over a check for \$1,443,281.07, as the agreed purchase-price for thirty-nine of Mr. Lester Martin's paintings."

MRS. LESTER MARTIN let out a subdued shriek and toppled into a heap. Martin, beaming, ignored her. The reporters muttered,

The Paradillan said, "Mr. Martin has prepared a display of the purchased pictures in the adjoining room. You may enter one by one to examine them. I caution you in advance that some are highly experimental and may appear strange, even barbaric, to you. But bear in mind that beauty is in the eye of the beholder; and to me, these masterful paintings sum up all of Earth's power and grandeur. His Altitude will give these the place of honor in his collection."

The alien allowed the buzzing reporters into the bedroom to view the thirty-nine

pictures. Isolated comments drifted out. "Passed up Rembrandt for tripe like this!" "Look at those crazy zigzags!" "You understand that stuff? I sure don't!" "Me neither!"

At last the newsmen and photographers had finished viewing the exhibit, and all had left, bustling back to file their sensational stories. Only the Paradillan and the Martins remained. The alien handed a sealed envelope to the grinning Martin. "My bill," the Paradillan said.

Martin slit the envelope and read the bill:

FOR SERVICES RENDERED

<i>Passage, Paradilla-Earth, round trip</i>	\$19,565.50	Terran
<i>Hotel and travel expenses</i>	4,200.21	Terran
<i>Miscellaneous expenses</i>	1,806.39	Terran
<i>Fee for services</i>	10,000.00	Terran
TOTAL	\$35,572.10	Terran

MARTIN smiled. "Naturally, I can't pay it for a while. But I'll have the money for you as soon as it starts coming in."

"Let us hope so."

"I don't see how it can miss. Thanks for everything."

"The pleasure was mine. Farewell."

The biotic unit reversed its treads and solemnly rolled through the open door.

Lester Martin cackled gleefully. He waved the bill aloft.

"It worked! It worked! Beth, we're rich!"

"A million and a half bucks for your paintings," Beth murmured dazedly. "I still can't believe it really happened Lester."

"It didn't," Lester said. "You can put the check in your scrapbook, if you like."

"What?"

"The check isn't any good. The whole thing was a fake, Beth! Got it? A downright fake!"

Her eyes slowly widened. "Lester, what are you talking about?"

"The Elevated Mightiness of Paradilla doesn't have any art collection. A Terran painting wouldn't last two years in Paradilla's atmosphere."

"But—what..."

"Remember when Marty Bryan went on that expedition to Paradilla last year? We cooked the whole thing up just before he left. He would hire a Paradillan to come here and stage the whole thing, go shopping for the Mightiness' collection, stir up a lot of publicity—and then pick *my* stuff!"

BETH'S MOUTH opened and closed fishwise. "All a fake?"

"I'll be on every front page tonight. And you know how art collectors are. They don't give a damn for ability; they just want names. Well, tomorrow morning I'll be the biggest name on Earth! Come on. Let's get those paintings out of the bedroom and down to the furnace."

"To the furnace?" Beth repeated dimly.

"Sure! Suppose someone finds them and realizes they were never shipped to Paradilla? It's safer to destroy them. But there are plenty more where those came from."

"But—but—suppose somebody goes to Paradilla and asks to see the Mightiness' art collection? What then?"

"Firstly, hardly anybody ever goes Paradilla. Second, what if they do find out, years from now? By then we'll be rich!"

Another objection occurred to Beth. "Say—I thought all Paradillans were millionaires! How come one of them would be willing to travel all that dis-

tance just for a few thousand dollars?"

"Who says a millionaire isn't always interested in getting a little more? Besides, Marty played up the fun angle of the trip. Be a celebrity on Earth; hoax the Terrans. He probably had to beat away applicants for the job."

THE PHONE was ringing raucously by the time the Martins returned emptyhanded from the furnace room. Mr. Sateen was calling, swallowing his pride and humbly asking for permission to represent

Lester as a client. d'Entendre and a few dozen other enterprising art dealers had the same notion later in the day, and got the same answer: Lester intended to represent himself in the art markets.

Within a week, Lester had sold off his entire backlog of paintings and had commissions for fifty new ones at exorbitant prices. The Paradillan publicity had done its work.

A week later, Lester quietly forwarded a check for \$40,000 Terran to his Paradillan cohort—and painted happily ever after.

The murder was "solved" but a sex-crazed girl lured Simon Ark into

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Special City

by Jackson Barrow

There was no escape. The Carmel family had been selected in the usual manner, and now they must go to the special city, from which no one returned. The War Enforcement Corps made sure of that...

WHEN THE truck drew up to the curb outside the house, two uniformed men got out and crossed the concrete walk to the front door. One of the men rang the doorbell.

The man and the woman inside the house heard the bell ringing but neither went to the door.

When the bell rang again they let it ring.

The men outside stopped ringing and knocked at the door.

Those inside ignored the knocking. They remained huddled together in the living room, a compact family group. In a circle around them stood the four or five small, packed traveling bags they would take with them. Since it was only June, and they were not allowed to take any permanent

household fixtures or bulky personal belongings, no more bags were required.

They would not, of course, be returning, and all they would need for the duration of their stay in the other city would be waiting for them in their new home there.

The knocking came again, louder than before.

It went unanswered.

The two men at the door wore the blue uniform of the WEC—the War Enforcement Corps. Their sleek, black metal guns were slung muzzle-up over their shoulders. One was tall and thin. The other was huge, taller than the thin man and massively built. The thin man carried under his arm a clipboard, thick with papers.

"You might as well open up," the burly one, named Bartow, called through the door. His deep, rough voice was not impatient and not unkind. "It won't do you any good not to. We'll only have to come in for you."

There was no response.

"Please cooperate," the thin one called, banging on the door. "The less fuss over this, the better. For all of us. You

don't want to upset the children, do you?" His name was Morgan, and he held the superior rank of the two.

He pounded on the door.

INSIDE, the woman stood with a protective arm about each of the children. One child was a small blonde girl, no more than four or five; the other was a boy of about ten or eleven.

"Answer it," the woman said softly, turning her head so she would not have to face the man as she spoke.

The man stepped toward the door then halted. The pounding went on. The man hesitated and retreated a step or two back toward the woman. With desperate longing calculation, he glanced toward the door at the far end of the room. Again he stopped.

"Go ahead, answer it," she repeated. "Let them in before they break the door down."

"Let them break it down," the man said. "Why should I help them? Why should we make it easy for them?"

"It's no use. We can't fight them. Let them in."

"I don't think I will," the

man said. "Let them come and get us."

"Mommy," the girl said, looking at her mother and then down at the tiny, limp rag doll she cradled in her arms. "can I take my dolly with me?"

"Why certainly, sweetheart, you can take your dolly." To her husband she said, "It's too late for thinking. Just open the door and let them in quietly."

THE man shuffled to the door and turned the door latch.

"Just in time," Guard Morgan said, striding into the living room. "A minute more and we would have had to force our way in."

"Please be reasonable," Guard Bartow said, following close behind the other, "and don't give us any more trouble. We don't want to harm you."

"You're just doing a job," the man said, acidly.

"Yeah, that's it. That's the way to look at it. We're just doing a job." Guard Bartow seized on the opening eagerly.

"What a job! You must be proud of it."

"It's no worse than a lot of others," Guard Morgan said, a

little annoyed at himself for going on the defensive. It was a fine job, a necessary job, a life work to be proud of. "All here," he made check marks on a sheet of paper on the clipboard. "Two adults, husband and wife, Samuel and Louisa Carmel, and two children, a boy and a girl, Steve and Carol Carmel. The time," he glanced at his wrist watch, "1125 hours."

"Where are we going?" Bella asked.

"On a trip," Louisa said.

"A long trip?"

"Quite a long trip."

"Are these men going with us?"

"Yes, these men are going with us."

"They're nice men," Bella decided, smiling at the burly one. "Hello," she said. "Are you a policeman?"

GUARD BARTOW said, "Something like a policeman. Here," he reached into a pocket and gun metal scraped with the movement against the buttons of his uniform jacket, "would you like some chocolate?"

"Can I have it, mommy?" Bella turned to her mother.

"You may have it," Louisa said. "Thank the man."

"Thank you. I knew you were a nice man."

"Those are the bags?" Guard Morgan asked.

Samuel Carmel nodded and the guard made a notation on his papers.

"Of course, we'll have to examine them," Guard Morgan said, still writing.

"What for?"

"A routine check. We take no chances, although you've been under surveillance since you were selected. That's routine, too. But there's no need to tell you. You know that."

"Surveillance!" Carmel said. "Two sentries walking up and back, in front of the house, night and day, since we were notified three days ago? Another camped in the back yard? You call that surveillance?"

"Mine was an unfortunate choice of words," Guard Morgan replied. "You were under guard. A very necessary thing, too." Tracking down fugitives was annoying and time consum-

ing. And if they killed themselves, replacements would have to be hurriedly picked.

"And what do you call the rest of it? No visitors allowed. No mail permitted, incoming or outgoing. Confining us all to the house—the children, too—not letting them go outside to play. The phone removed. No communication allowed. What do you call that?"

GUARD MORGAN said, "Security precautions. They may seem harsh but they are necessary."

"No chance to make a final statement, or speak a final word. Do you call that decency? Or justice? Or humanity?"

"I don't call it anything," Guard Morgan said.

"Why didn't you just come along and take us away then? Why did you have to prolong all this misery? Why couldn't you do it all at once—one swift shock, a moment of disbelief, and then it's over, before there's time to realize what's happening, let alone believe it's possible? Why not a merciful quickness instead of this slow torture?"

"Calm yourself," Guard Morgan said.

Outbursts of this kind did not disturb Morgan. He took them all in stride, they were so common. "You know how all this is done as well as I do, and that there's an important time element involved. You know I have nothing to do with making the regulations governing procedure. I must examine the bags before you leave this house. The reason why is obvious. It would be most disastrous—it would create an international crisis of the utmost gravity—if you were somehow to leave here with a device hidden in your luggage and the event should come off prematurely. So kindly open each of the bags so I can see what's inside."

"Don't worry," Carmel said. "You won't find a cosmic gadget hidden away. Or an H bomb. You won't even find an A bomb, not even a small one."

"I sincerely hope so. But you'd be surprised at the tricks people sometimes try. They hide guns, knives, explosives—you ought to see some of the contraptions—even clubs. We can't be too careful."

GUARD BARTOW joined in. "Remember the time the guy hid the samurai sword in a false-bottomed suitcase? A souvenir his father got in that old-fashioned war against the Japanese. A beautiful thing, that sword. He reached in, saying he wanted a sweater because he was chilly, ripped it out suddenly, and took a swipe at me with it—damned near killed me. Good thing I ducked. If I hadn't he'd have taken my head off with it. Chopped a hole right through the cab of the truck. Had to rough him up a little after that, something I don't like to do. I like it to run smooth and peaceable, no fuss, no trouble, all reasonable. He told me all about it, afterward, in the truck, once he quieted down. We had a long trip that time. The city was somewhere in Kansas. This is only a short one for you, just a few hours. You.. "

"Save that for later," Guard Morgan said. "We're not here to chat. Let's get this over with." Bartow had to be kept in line sometimes. With his simple, direct nature he was sometimes too easily distracted from his fundamental duty.

There were moments when Morgan wondered if Bartow's temperament was exactly suited to WEC work.

"Sorry I couldn't oblige you," Carmel said to Guard Morgan. "I'll try to do better next time. I just didn't have anything around or I might have tried. I might have been able to whip up some small kind of bomb—nothing to make an international crisis, but enough to go off with a bang."

"Go ahead, open the bags," Guard Morgan said, a little curtly, feeling the subject had been pursued far enough.

THE MAN opened all the bags. Guard Morgan went through their contents carefully. He examined each item of clothing and the few small, personal treasures the family was taking. Nothing that might conceal any kind of weapon that could be used to take them by surprise on the way was overlooked. Then he tapped and poked at the bags, looking for false bottoms and hidden compartments, doing his job slowly and thoroughly.

Finally, adding marks and

notations to the documents on the clip-board, he said, "Everything seems all right. Repack them and we'll get moving. We'll try to have you there before sunset so you can get settled tonight."

Young Steve Carmel stared at the guards and drank in all that was said. He watched the examination of the bags with interest but occasionally an expression of puzzlement flitted across his face.

Carol's attention wandered. She ogled the burly guard and accepted his repeated offerings of chocolate, examining each piece seriously before stuffing it into her mouth. She caressed her rag doll, crooned at it and rocked it in her arms as if she were lulling it with a cradle song. Next, in secret conclave, she went whispering to her mother.

"I don't like that one," she referred to Guard Morgan. "I don't like that one at all. He's not friendly at all, and he's too skinny. Papa doesn't like him either. He's not a nice man."

Kneeling, Carmel repacked the bags, folding each garment carefully. Looking on, Guard Morgan reflected: Why are

they all the same way? It's very odd that they should fold each garment just so, as if much more use were expected of it.

FROM WHERE he stood at his father's shoulder Steve asked, "When are we coming back?"

"When are we..." Carmel started to say, stopping his work and turning to look at the boy.

Guard Morgan interrupted, shutting off the emotional outburst before it could get started. "Never mind that. Save the questions for later. Get on with the packing."

Silently Samuel Carmel continued working, snapping and strapping each filled bag shut.

Carol roved about the room, smiling coyly at the burly guard. His response was to keep plying her with chocolates.

"Put the bags in the back of the truck," Guard Morgan directed when the father had finished. "I'll give you a hand... All right, everybody come along now."

Louisa Carmel turned to take a final look before leaving

the room. She sniffed; her lower lips quivered, and tears glistened momentarily in her eyes. But there was no violent outburst of emotion. The woman and the children, helped by Guard Bartow, settled themselves in the seats along the sides of the truck. The bags were lifted over the tailboard onto the truck floor. The father climbed aboard. Guard Morgan busied himself with the papers on the clip-board. Throughout all of this the driver, a very young uniformed WEC man, remained standing just outside the cab of the gray-painted truck, watching the loading intently.

Passers-by hurried past with averted eyes. It was not only impolite but unwise—an improper attitude—to display too much interest in a removal. If neighbors watched, they watched furtively, peering through the slats of closed blinds as the bags were placed under the long, wooden, bench-like seats or against the rear of the truck cab. Or, from behind artfully arranged curtains, they watched the family squeeze together—girl, mother, father and finally boy—on one side.

Guard Bartow chose a spot opposite the girl, who immediately busied herself scolding the rag doll in her lap.

Last to climb aboard was Guard Morgan. He hooked up the tailboard, glanced at his watch, and made additional notations on the papers on the clip-board. He was pleased with the way it was going now. These were good people—brave and self-contained, comparatively. They seemed to understand and accept. They would make no real trouble.

"All set now," he advised Guard Bartow. "Tell him to roll it."

II

GUARD BARTOW'S signal was a rap on the truck cab. The motor coughed, turned over. The truck started to move, down the empty street and away from the unpeopled house.

The streets whizzed by. Occasionally people would stop and stare boldly at the WEC truck. By and large, however, it was utterly ignored. Soon the streets of clusters of houses gave way to streets of scattered houses. Then, reaching open

country, there were only isolated houses.

The woman sat in stony silence, except when she turned to speak a quiet word or two to the girl. For her part, Carol babbled on, wrapped up in her rag doll, ignoring the scenery. Carmel seemed sunk in untouchable despair, as if now, with the truck grinding along the road on the way to the city, he could not help but believe it was true and that all hope of reprieve was gone.

Young Steve stared, at the suburbs and then the countryside rolling by, rich with ripening grain and dotted with cool white farmhouses in the mild, warm sunshine. He stared at Guard Bartow watching Carol with an obviously warm kindly interest. He glanced now and then at Guard Morgan writing at the interminable papers on the clip-board, riffling through the papers time and time again.

Suddenly Louisa Carmel turned to her husband and reached out and took his hand. Guard Morgan noticed this act. There they go, he thought. In their mute misery they cling to one another, finding what courage, consolation, solace they

can in the knowledge that at least the family is all together, that what happens to one will happen to all. Together they are finding the strength they need—he to fight back surging protest against what he considers the outrage of fate, the woman to combat and contain the tears she knows can only serve to heighten and aggravate their misery... But it is better this way. Better this way than to have to contend with futile, desperate violence...

THE GIRL got along famously with her new friend, Guard Bartow. Carol smiled and coquetted for him and seemed to know she had made a conquest. He fed her chocolate, which she pretended to feed her doll. She made such a sticky smear of the doll's face that finally Guard Bartow squatted on his heels before her and wiped the doll's face clean with his own pocket handkerchief.

"Do you like me?" she smiled into his face.

"You're as pretty as a picture," he smiled back. "If I had a little girl I'd want her to be

just like you. I like you very much."

"Will I see you again? Will you come to my house and bring chocolate?"

Embarrassment suddenly wiped the tender smile from Guard Bartow's face. He looked around helplessly, and Guard Morgan was annoyed. Bartow had a bad habit of getting himself involved with them and inadvertently bringing their feelings to a head. Bartow had a propensity for forgetting that it was not his job to console them, to hold hands with them, but to see that they were delivered to the city without mishap.

"I'm afraid he'll have other things to do," the mother said. "He's a very busy man."

Guard Bartow looked at her, smiling now a faint diffident smile of gratitude that was somehow unhappy and confused.

FOR THE first time since the beginning of the trip the boy spoke. "Where are we going?"

It was not an idle question. Obviously, Steve had been pondering it for some time, and he asked it with such seriousness

that it demanded an answer. The question stirred the father out of his silence. "We're going to the city."

"But we just left the city."

"This is another city we are going to," Carmel said.

"What city?"

"A special kind of city. It doesn't have a name. It has a number... That's right, isn't it?" He turned for confirmation to Guard Morgan, although he knew that Guard Morgan knew he did not need it.

"27T3," Guard Morgan said, catching on, but deciding to ignore the bitter irony. Samuel Carmel was fully informed about the special cities.

"What does that mean?" Steve asked. "Why doesn't this city have a name like other cities instead of a number?"

Guard Morgan shrugged and looked at Carmel. "You tell him. In your own way, if you want to."

"I think I will. I think I ought to tell him."

"What are you going to tell him?" Louisa asked.

"Everything. I think he ought to know."

"What good will that do?

Why don't you just leave him be?"

"Because," the father said, "he half understands now. He guesses, he draws his own conclusions. He doesn't believe the tales you tell the child. For her, for the baby, these tales of sweet wonder are all right. For the boy, no. If he is old enough to have any idea why he is with us at a time like this, he is old enough to be entitled to the full truth. Or as much of it as he can understand. He wouldn't be asking as he did if he didn't know some of it."

"Who knows the full truth?" the mother's own agonizing questioning burst through. "Why is this done? What is the goal of it? What good comes of it? Why must it be done this way and not some other way? Couldn't just as good results be gotten by doing something else?... What is the truth of it? Who knows the full truth? Do you?"

EMOTION, emotion, naked emotion, Guard Morgan thought. *That* you were sure to get from them all, sooner or later. But it was best, especially at the start, not to try to

stop them, to let them get the worst of it out of their systems.

"All right then, the boy is entitled to as much of the truth as we know," Carmel said. "Maybe telling it to him will help us to understand all over. Maybe it will help us make some sense of all this."

He addressed Guard Morgan, "Is it all right with you if we tell the boy all about this? As much as we know?"

"There's no regulation against it, and I have no objection. You're free to say anything you want."

"You might learn something too," Carmel said.

"Entirely possible," Guard Morgan answered, leaving his private doubts unvoiced. In his years with the WEC he'd been through it all, from A to Z and back again. "I might be able to help you with some of it."

"My son," Samuel Carmel began, "you must listen carefully and try to understand. What I am going to say is going to be hard for a boy your age to understand, but you are going to have to understand quickly because you will never get another chance. This is the last time this will be told to

you. Do you understand that, my boy?"

"I think so. Something bad is going to happen to us, isn't it?"

"Yes, my boy—something bad. And it has already started."

"**H**OLD ON there a minute." Guard Morgan's voice had a faint edge of indignation in it. "It may seem bad in the small, narrow view—but in the long, broad view it is a good and necessary thing, in spite of some unfortunate aspects it may have."

"A very bad thing, my boy," Carmel insisted. "I take the short view of it. I can afford to now. The only luxury left me is the right to speak honestly and fear no one. You—" he spoke directly to Guard Morgan—"need not apologize for nor defend the system to me. I won't be around to bear witness against you."

"I speak from conviction," Guard Morgan replied—"not from fear of unorthodoxy. If I didn't believe in the rightness of what I do I would resign from the War Enforcement Corps." Bold words—but it

was not so easy to resign from the WEC without being suspected of improper thinking.

"Fear, conviction—what difference? Taken from an unfortunate aspect—the end will be the same."

"What is going to happen to us?" Steve asked.

"We are going to this city we started to talk about, this very special city."

"27T3, and we won't be coming back."

"No, we won't be coming back."

"Why are we going? What will we do there?"

"We will stay there," Carmel said, "until they have the War. We will live there until the bomb is dropped. We will move into a new home and live there until the bomb is dropped on the city."

"Then we will all die," the boy said. "Why? I don't want to die. I don't want to go to this city and die."

GUARD MORGAN said, "Someone must be in the city." Children were the most difficult, with their direct, troublesome questions. "Someone must be in the city when the

bomb is dropped, or there would be no point in the war. There would be no use having it because it would serve no purpose. It wouldn't count. All this is written in the treaty."

"Why we must go to the city—why anyone must go to the city—is what I am trying to explain to you, my son," Carmel said. "I thought I understood why—until three days ago. Now I know I do not understand. All I can tell you is how it came about. Maybe you'll understand."

"But who's going to drop the bomb?"

"The Oriental Alliance. If you'd gone to school another year or two you'd have learned all about it."

"I know about the Oriental Alliance," Steve said. "They are the enemy. They have always been the enemy. They are the other system. They do not live like us and they do not think like us. That is what makes them our enemy. That is why we must fight wars."

"Then you know about our wars with the Oriental Alliance?"

"Not very much. I know we

have wars against them, a lot of wars."

"Twenty-six, so far," Guard Morgan said. "This one will be the twenty-seventh."

"The Twenty-seventh World War," Carmel added. "And not all against the Oriental Alliance."

"The biggest one since the Thirteenth," Guard Morgan said, "with three target cities. A very big and important war, settling some grave and difficult issues."

"Do you understand why they call this city we are going to 27T3?" Carmel asked.

"I'm not sure."

"It's very simple. The Twenty-seven because this will be World War Twenty-seven, and the T3 because this is the third target city of this war."

GUARD MORGAN rounded out the explanation. "They started calling them World Wars a long time ago. Back in the days of the barbaric, old-fashioned wars. But when the old-fashioned kind of war was outlawed they kept calling the new and civilized wars by the old name. War was very inhuman in those days."

"What is 'civilized'?" Steve asked.

"'Civilized' means not animal," Carmel said. "If two men fight one another with their fists and feet and teeth, they are animals. If they use their minds to make weapons which they use on one another only according to special rules about how they may use these weapons, they are civilized."

"That's a crude way of putting it," Guard Morgan objected. "Civilization is ordinarily defined as the social order based on the cumulative and incessant refinement of all the highest arts, instincts and capabilities of man."

"I don't understand that," Steve said.

"Did you understand what I said?" Carmel asked.

"Civilized is not being an animal. Is that what you said, father?"

"Close enough."

"There's more to it than that," Guard Morgan protested.

"Not much," Samuel Carmel said. "I see it now. Civilization is no more than man's pretense of not being an animal. Those, like yourself, who believe oth-

erwise are the biggest pretenders of all."

"Sour grapes," Guard Morgan retorted. "And don't think you're an original thinker. I've heard the same sort of sour grapes talk before."

"What did you expect—a philosophical acceptance? A calm and reasoned journey unto death?"

"WE GET THAT once in a while." Guard Morgan shrugged. "And isn't that what you're trying to do for your son, prepare him for what is ahead?"

"Or," Carmel continued, not listening to or not heeding Guard Morgan's words, "a warped striving to be exceptional at all costs; to come up with some outlandish pose or insane attitude; to be as bizarre as possible; to exit with bravado and style—just so that the guard assigned to you might be impressed that there is something new under the sun after all?"

"We get those too," Guard Morgan said. "But we do not honor their delusions." Yes. They got all kinds. The weepers, the prayers, the singers of

hymns, the spewers of profanity; those who slept all the way and those who ate; the drinkers, the readers, the bribe-offerers, the laughers and the quippers and those who begged to be shot en route.

"And the tearful ones—you get tearful ones, too, don't you? Did you expect tears from me? An utter preoccupation with my own anguish, the sharp consciousness of my own mortality? Did you expect a flood of tears and a chorus of sobs and sighs and moans—premature lamentation for self? Did you expect that of me? Did you expect a family of wailers?"

"I expect nothing. I make no anticipations. I see all sorts, and I let nothing affect the duty I must perform. Sour grapes is the way I think of your kind," Guard Morgan said. They all could be classified, they all fell into one recognizable category or other.

"Sour grapes? Did you expect cheers—the rah rah spirit? Did you expect me to fall on my face and kiss your feet?"

"If someone else were in your place and you were in my

shoes, you'd feel just the way I feel," Guard Morgan said.

"And vice versa."

"**A**FTER ALL, you were chosen under the make-up quota. You were picked by lot. You're not here because you came automatically under the jurisdiction of the War Enforcement Corps. Suppose someone else had been picked—someone you knew. I can just picture your reaction then. I know your type. I can hear you saying: 'Did you hear about old Harry? Tough luck, getting picked that way. But someone's got to be picked, you know. Just one of those things. Nothing you can do about it. And they always take the whole family, so it's not really so bad. All go at once, no one is left behind. No loose ends. No muddle. Nothing sticky.

"'And they say it's not really such a bad way to go. You never know it when the bomb goes off. It's like dying in your sleep. You never know exactly when they're going to drop it. They keep the planes flying overhead all the time, sometimes for weeks. And they try to keep everyone happy till it

happens. Each family is together in its own little home—better than the old one, in many cases—and there's the best of entertainment, none of it live, of course. They try to make it a nice, typical, balanced city. They get the best of food and drink—it isn't as if they were in a prison or being tortured or ill-treated or deprived of anything. So it's goodbye to old Harry, it might have been you or me. One of these days real soon we'll all have to have a drink to him. . . And what does it all prove? It's all a gamble. You win or lose. And old Harry lost. What more is there to say?"

"Then stop trying to convince me I won," Carmel said. "Or that I have any obligation to take losing like a good sport, as if this were some kind of game. There'll be no opportunity to win tomorrow or next year to make up for today's losing. Don't treat this as if it were some inconsequential sporting venture."

"That's the way it is," Guard Morgan said. "That's the way it's been since the old-fashioned wars had to be replaced." But there was always the inescapa-

able question—why *these* people? Fine, useful people. Society was better off without the others, but *these* people added to and enriched society.

"What were these old-fashioned wars like?" Steve asked suddenly. "What was wrong with them?"

FOR A MOMENT no one spoke, then Samuel Carmel said, "To answer that we have to go all the way back to the times when stones and clubs were the only weapons and a man had to be right up close to his enemy to do him any damage."

"Clubs and stones?" Steve said. "Wouldn't a war with clubs and stones be barbaric and inhuman?"

"Not so very bad, my boy."

"Exactly so," Guard Morgan said. "Barbaric and inhuman..."

"...a very sound way of settling disputes at the time," Carmel said. "At least there was an honest and personal hatred in our ancestors when they bashed one another with clubs. They grunted, they sweated, they labored—they worked hard at killing. It was

good honest physical exertion. Their motives were honest and easily understood. They swung their clubs for lust, for anger, for fear, for hate."

"It is wrong," Guard Morgan said, "to kill a man you hate, or hate a man you kill. There should be no personal feelings involved in a war."

"But it is worse still to kill a man you do not hate or even know to settle a dispute you're not even sure exists."

"More sour grapes afterthoughts," Guard Morgan said. "You are denying the essence of our culture, the hard-earned wisdom it took us so long to acquire. Would you prefer a return to the days of the old-fashioned wars?" Of course Carmel wouldn't. Deep in his heart he knew a return to the old-fashioned wars was unthinkable.

"It doesn't matter what I prefer," the father said, a bitterly resigned response Guard Morgan was not expecting.

"WHAT ABOUT those old-fashioned wars?" Steve asked. "What was wrong with them?"

"They killed too many peo-

ple eventually, and did too much damage. Man was not content to make war with stones and clubs. Man put his mind to work and invented the spear, so he could kill at a distance with more efficiency and less danger to himself. Then the bow and arrow. Then the sword. And, naturally, a defense to counteract each new weapon—the shield against the spear, the helmet against the club, the coat of mail against the arrow. Offense and defense became the art of war. Man hunted in packs, and swift movement and transportation became important. Man put the animals he could domesticate or train to the uses of war—the horse, the camel, the elephant, the mule, the dog. War became a science and soldiering a respected profession to which trained men dedicated their lives. Am I correct in this?" Carmel asked Guard Morgan.

"Go on," Guard Morgan nodded.

Quietly and calmly, Samuel Carmel continued to relate how each new invention and discovery—everything from gunpowder to the steam engine to TNT

—was put to the uses of war. He told how the development of the machine gun, the aeroplane, more powerful explosives, artillery of greater range and accuracy changed the nature of war, how up-close conflict gradually gave way to large scale killing done at a distance.

"**A**ND SO World War I resulted in millions of people, combatants and non-combatants alike, being killed on battlefields and in cities thousands of miles apart," Carmel concluded. "And it is with this World War I that our story really begins."

"World War I was the beginning of the pattern," Guard Morgan agreed and added reflectively, "and if one had discernment enough, one could have foreseen that the kind of war we now have would eventually have to evolve if man were to survive."

"This kind of war?" Carmel cried, his calm deserting him. "Is this better? Do you call this being singled out blindly for destruction a war?" He looked upward and shook a finger at the sky, where in-

credibly swift planes, flying in precise formation, zoomed past leaving feathers of jet exhaust behind. "Do you call that a war?"

"A war of sorts," Guard Morgan said calmly. "Strictly speaking, a sort of civilized substitute for war." It was exactly that—a limited kind of war made inevitable by the development of man. What alternative was there? Hadn't history proved the need for this solution to the problem that reasonable and practical men had worked out?

III

THE FATHER'S outburst was short-lived. To Guard Morgan's relief, he recovered his calm and resumed his tracing of the evolution of war from the random, massive destructiveness typified in the early World Wars to its ultimate controlled form.

The boy asked questions, the father patiently explained. Guard Morgan clarified points he thought obscure; expanded on others that Carmel barely mentioned; added his own commentary, and debated matters of fact and interpretation of fact. If the talk wandered, or

the debate became too warm or involved, a sharp or mocking reference by Carmel to the fact that limitations of time prevented the exploration of each fine point brought them back to the subject.

Steve appeared to lose interest during an argument that developed about the propaganda devices used to gain control of the minds of men. His attention wandered and he stared out at the fields where the tall corn waved silkily in the soft breeze. He asked, "Isn't that corn ready to be picked?"

"It's ripe, but it won't be harvested," Guard Morgan said.

"Why not?"

"THESE FIELDS are within the danger zone. They might be contaminated. The blast might make the corn unsafe for use as food. For quite a distance now everything you've passed has been part of the city."

"All will go with the city when the city goes," Carmel said. "Part of the rules of this gentlemanly, deadly game."

"The game is necessary, so there must be rules, and the

rules must be obeyed. It is that simple," Guard Morgan said. And there could be no cutting of corners, no making of exceptions. The pattern had to be maintained whole or, chipped away here, undermined there, it would soon crumble. That was why, sorry as he felt for these fine people, he could not help them. Start with doing something to help the Carmels and there would be others, fully as worthy. Start with small things and big things would be sure to follow. And then the whole pattern would collapse, to be followed by chaos and ruin.

"Here is a fine example of propaganda," Carmel said. "What he says falls sweetly on his ears. He has repeated it so often he has come to believe it himself."

"Isn't what he's saying true?"

"He believes it," the father shrugged. "We are forced to accept it."

"You believed it too, a week ago," Guard Morgan said.

"I was blind to truth then," Carmel said. "My mind was dull from lack of use. I would accept the half-truth, and

the plausible explanation, and the all-inclusive rationalization. Now I will accept nothing less than the full truth, without embellishment and without distortion."

GUARD MORGAN said, "You know the full truth, but you refuse to accept it." He was tempted to say that he could understand why the truth went down so hard. It had to be a bitter pill when you felt it so individually, so personally. But he checked himself; there was no room in his job for maudlin sentiment.

"Never mind," Carmel said. "We can come to no meeting of the minds on that. Your WEC training has left too deep a mark on you. The most significant thing about World War II was the establishing of precedent for use of the atomic bomb, and hence for successor weapons of still greater destructiveness. Once and for all the principle that it is good and desirable to sacrifice the few so that the many might be spared acquired moral validity. From that time on it didn't matter what new and more terrible weapons were developed

—their use was justified, even expected.”

“Agreed,” Guard Morgan said. And that was the heart of the matter. Though a few might suffer, the general interest came foremost. “The thousands killed at Hiroshima spared the lives of the hundreds of thousands in both armies who would surely have fallen in an invasion of the Japanese home islands. The unfortunates dying in the special cities make it possible for all the others, the rest of us, to live in peace and productivity without fear.”

But it was too bad about this Carmel family. He liked them. He would have been happy to count them among his friends. He would have liked to help them, if some way could be found without breaking the pattern and without exposing himself to reprisal.

“NOW WE COME to the heart of the explanation of why we are here now and what is happening to us,” Carmel said. “The weapons of war, particularly the nuclear weapons, became fearful and were used freely in the series of

World Wars that followed World War II in rapid succession. Eventually only two great powers were left in the world, the same two that still exist, and the wars between them became increasingly destructive. Push button wars became reality. Whole cities were destroyed by the flipping of buttons thousands of miles away. Killing at a distance developed into an exact science. The new weapons never failed.”

“I must object to that,” Guard Morgan said. “Failure was common, in spite of the great pains each of the two powers took to create the impression that its weapons were infallible. To this day weapons fail, because man himself is imperfect. Why, within recent years there were two failures that the whole world knows of. One of their bombs failed to go off, and two years later one of our bombs failed to explode.”

“These were intentional failures. There was deep reason behind these failures, one to each side. They were the product of ingenious planning and not of miscalculation or inferiority in manufacture of the bombs.”

"Surmise. The flimsiest speculation," Guard Morgan said. He had heard the stories, the specious and absurd explanations of these failures that were clearly ascribable to human error.

"Deliberately contrived failure," Carmel insisted. "To set up precedent, to leave the victims-to-be some sop of hope that they might be spared, that the bomb might not explode. The certain way to stir up rebellion in the doomed is to deprive them of the last shred of hope. With that tiny shred of hope to cling to, they will submit meekly to their ordeal. Without it, their behavior becomes dangerously unpredictable. The blindest of fools should see that clearly. Why were not other bombs exploded when the first ones did not go off? Surely there were others available."

"BECAUSE it was not right. It was wrong; it was deemed wrong by the wisest of men in the councils of government to victimize those who had been providentially spared," Guard Morgan said. "The purpose of these wars, these bomb droppings, is not to

kill people but to preserve the peace."

"And the occasional intentional failures," Carmel hammered home his point, "are intended to keep them hoping to the end. Men cannot live without hope, no matter how slim. To deprive a man of hope is to reduce him to the animal, together with the depriver. Don't you see that?"

"I won't argue the point," Guard Morgan said. "But I think you're wrong."

"You are the authority," the father said. "You are the student of the subject. You should know. On what did they blame the failure of the first bomb?"

"Mechanical failure."

"And the second bomb, the one that fell on their city?"

"Mechanical failure."

"Do you believe in these coincidental mechanical failures?"

"I believe whatever official explanations are made by higher authority," Guard Morgan said. Privately, secretly he had had a few fleeting doubts. The whole subject was one he did not allow his mind to dwell on.

"What happened to the people in these cities?"

"They were spared. They were pardoned."

"All of them?"

"All of them, so far as I know."

"Why?"

"There was a feeling it should be so. There was grumbling among the general population."

"Does the government yield to that kind of pressure?"

"No."

"What notice is ordinarily taken of grumbling by the general population? What is the reaction of government?"

"You know the answer to that as well as I do."

"**O**F COURSE. Grumblers find themselves in a Target City, not outside, where they are free to express their opinions about what ought to be done to people lucky enough to be left over after a nuclear blast that didn't come off as planned... But nothing like that happened to these grumblers, did it?"

"Not to my knowledge."

"That means no, doesn't it—or else you'd have heard about it?"

"No, then."

"So there you are!" the father smiled in triumph.

"You've proved nothing," Guard Morgan said.

"To me all this proves, plain as day," the father said, "that the defective bomb and the known grumblers left undisciplined were part of the same plan. The grumblers were undoubtedly secret agents whipping up feeling on instruction from the government."

"All things are possible—even this fanciful explanation."

"Nevertheless, when the bomb failed to go off in our Target City, all the people in it were spared, and the enemy did not protest."

"Why should he? It was his bomb, assembled by his technicians, and delivered by his planes, flown by his pilots. If anything went wrong in assembly or delivery it had to be all the enemy's own fault."

"Was honor satisfied? Did the enemy demand another chance?"

"The fault was his. He had no right."

"Don't you really think it was part of a prearranged plan?"

"No."

"That when our bomb failed to go off it was in fair and equal payment for their dud?"

GUARD MORGAN said, "It was pure mischance in both instances. Discussions are in progress right now to assure there will be no recurrence of failure. They're tackling the problem head on, too, talking about our delivering our own bombs and dropping them on our own cities and their doing the same. That will be a bold step, a big advance. And the next logical development. They're ironing out the kinks right now."

"There was no more mischance to these duds," Carmel said, "than there is to the incidents that create the wars. Incidents and duds are planned and arranged. Why, there must be a master plan for the wars to come for fifty years ahead. Perhaps longer."

"Absurd," Guard Morgan said. "Wars arise as the result of conflict of interest. Blueprint or no, no one can predict when, how or where a conflict of interest will arise and how serious it will be."

"I don't understand this," Steve said.

"Never mind. It's not important that you understand this part of it, so long as you understand the main thing."

Guard Morgan said to the father, "It's too bad you didn't go into the service. You show a good grasp of matters." He was coming to have a warm feeling for this Carmel—a likeable man, an intelligent man whose intelligence was marred by only one flaw: his inability to accept the need to take his place in the Target City.

"It's the insight of the damned," Carmel said. "There's no room left in the mind for vacuous, parroted notions. It's almost worth being damned to see things so clearly."

IV

GUARD MORGAN said, "It's still a pity. You could have had a long, useful career." Carmel's attitude was—while Morgan could not condone it—understandable to some degree under the circumstances. Carmel had, perhaps, been jolted too suddenly from his hold on life, snatched too

precipitately from the comfortable orderliness of his existence. Could there not be some other, more gradual way—a way to give a selectee a chance to adjust psychologically to the fact of his selection?

"Spare me your pity. According to your logic, your standard of ethics, I am entitled to none. So do not perjure yourself."

Guard Morgan winced inwardly, as if a close personal friend had called him liar and traitor, and was silent. After a moment Carmel spoke again.

"So, my boy, once in a while they deliberately rig the bomb so that it will not go off. In that way the people in the city, waiting for it to fall, are allowed some small hope that they will be spared, that their doom is not absolute. But I see you're puzzled. I'm sorry, my boy. I forgot for a moment how young you are. Let me say it another way: They want to give them some reason to hope they may be spared."

"I understand that," Steve said. "But I still don't see why the people have to go to these cities, why anyone has to go."

"See," the father turned to

Guard Morgan, "insight comes to the damned of all ages. Only the damned have the courage to ask questions."

"Finish the story you started to tell," Guard Morgan said, not liking the small, vague doubts darting like shadows through his thoughts, not liking the impulse to turn the truck around and free these people and the devil with the consequences, the impulse to let them go and get them off his conscience. "Time is running short."

"I'M ALMOST done," the father said, very quietly. "There'll be time enough for me to finish telling my boy why he will never grow to be a man..."

"After World War II the wars became destructive beyond belief. Entire cities were destroyed, together with all their inhabitants. Death came whistling down out of the skies, suddenly and without warning. There would be a flash, a boom, a cloud of smoke and dust and fire. When the smoke cleared and the dust settled there were few survivors. In most cases it would have been

merciful if there had been none...

"And after the swift interchange of destruction came a swift and uneasy peace. And the wars went on, in spite of the early and repeated and increasingly emphatic warnings that not only civilization, but the very existence of man on earth was being jeopardized by them. Efforts were made to eliminate war. Sincere and earnest men tried all kinds of organizations, all kinds of covenants. None worked. And finally, as was inevitable, there came a struggle that did not end quickly.

"It was almost a struggle to extinction. Finally a peace of utter exhaustion was effected by the leaders of the world's peoples. And it was then, with the old-fashioned kind of war become impossible for the human race to bear, when mankind was rebuilding out of the ashes, that the new kind of controlled and limited war was agreed upon. That system, with some changes and improvements, is still in effect. It works very simply. Instead of fighting a disorganized and

brutal war, with deadly and uncontrollable weapons, war is conducted orderly and predictably, kept under firm control so it can never get out of hand..."

HE FELL silent. For a moment only the quiet strain of the truck motor, the whine of planes overhead, and the singing of Guard Bartow to the girl, Carol, were to be heard. The mother sat enwrapped in a private silence.

Guard Morgan said, "It is better this way, that wars be fought this way. This way man has preserved himself."

"Yes," said Carmel. "At one stroke eliminate all the undesirables..."

"Yes," Guard Morgan said. "And why not?... The incurably ill, the very old who have become a burden on the community, the idiotic, the dangerously insane, the criminal, the disloyal..." He remembered with a sudden ache the look in his old father's eyes when they had come for him many years before.

He remembered how, new on the job and still getting indoc-

trinated in the ways of the WEC, he had steeled himself to keep from crying out comfort, from uttering wild and reckless protest against injustice and inhumanity. He remembered how, after that, after they had taken his father, he had found it easy to throttle any weak, maudlin sentiments at their first stirrings in him.

"All the undesirables," Samuel Carmel went on. "All who think and speak for themselves. All the rebels, the outsiders. Everyone with heart and mind, with spirit and integrity. Everyone with warm human feeling. Everyone who sees the inhumanity and the ugliness of the world we have made. All, all, are herded into these target cities, especially built for this purpose, to await destruction. To live there, and wait there for the silent bomb to fall, never knowing when the bomb will be delivered but knowing it will be soon enough—a day, a week, a month at most, of living and waiting in fear and terror.

"**A**ND IF THERE are not enough undesirables, not

enough ill or helpless people to doom their immediate families by their illness or helplessness, there is a lottery. For the quotas must be met. The cities must have the agreed number of people in them. Names are drawn at random from the rosters of the guiltless citizens to fill the quotas. And my name is drawn, so I must go, and my entire family along with me."

"It must be so, to keep everything balanced—city for city, building for building, bomb for bomb, life for life," Guard Morgan said. But the doubts raged in him now, and the impulse to stop the truck and turn the family loose. He had to fight down the doubts and throttle the impulse. And his father's eyes, sad and pleading, haunted him. What, he asked himself, had the world gained by snuffing out that harmless old life and not letting the old man live on in peace until he died naturally?

"Let's end this discussion," Carmel said. "We were chosen, we are doomed, we are on our way to the city. That is all."

"There is always the one thin rope," Guard Morgan said. He liked Carmel and tried to

give him what small cheer he could. "It hasn't happened for a long time now. Maybe this time..."

Carmel disregarded him. He said, "And so, my boy, that is the way it is. That is the way it happened. That is the way it came about. Of course, there are a lot of stories—we have heard a lot of stories—we don't know for sure—about the people who refuse to go into the city. They see another way and they take the small chance it offers. They leap from the truck, it is said. They run into the shelter of the fields and woods. Some, it is said, manage to dodge the gunfire and escape. It is a foolhardy thing, a daring doomed to failure. A long, long chance at best."

"All stories," Guard Morgan said, shaking his head. "All stories. You know it would not be possible to hide out for long, even if you escaped. You know better than to believe such foolishness." The WEC was ruthless, tireless and efficient. Only the most daring could hope to escape, only the most resourceful could hope to escape recapture. But there were deep woods, caves, swamps,

mountain vastnesses where the hardy could survive by their wits.

V

THE ROAD, climbing now into rolling hill country in which wooded patches were interspersed with corn fields, bent acutely. As the truck approached the long, sharp bend the driver was forced to brake and reduce the truck's speed.

"How would you know?" Carmel asked. "Surely those who escape and remain hidden are not going to advertise that they are outlaw fugitives in hiding... It's a long, long chance, at best, but a chance."

"Gossip," Guard Morgan said. "Rumors. A lot of talk." He had always dismissed the talk as such. There *couldn't* be any substance to it.

Steve looked at his father puzzledly. The talk had gotten beyond his understanding.

"But even with you, the cold thinker with a mind like a steel trap and a heart to match and that big, fat, happy-go-lucky clown, here to stop me, it is a chance worth taking," Samuel Carmel cried.

Suddenly as if he had long before planned and calculated

and waited for the precise moment when the maneuver had the best chance of succeeding, he sprang up. His intent to break and make a run for it, to escape into the woods that crowded at this point almost to the edge of the road, was obvious. Instinctively Guard Morgan lunged after him. But the quickness of Carmel's move left Guard Morgan stumbling and clutching at a handful of air.

"Here, here," Guard Morgan called out, feeling his insides churning. "Don't try that. You can't get away with it. Come back here."

But, half-vaulting and half-falling, Samuel Carmel projected himself over the tailboard and came down hard on the blacktop road. Unhesitatingly he picked himself up and, running in a crouch, as if he were trying to make himself small, scrambled into the shelter of the woods.

AFTER A few strides he halted behind a small tree. From that temporary, dubious shelter he shouted back toward the truck, "Run. Run. This way. Follow me."

And then, without waiting to see what response there was, he started to run again, on a zig-zag, aim-confusing course taking him deeper and deeper into the woods.

Following his break for freedom a number of things happened almost simultaneously. A single sharp, startled cry burst from the woman. Then she was on her feet and leaning over the side of the truck and screaming, "No . . . no not this way. Don't leave us now. Come back."

Guard Bartow's hastily aimed weapon poured a stream of bullets that crackled and whipped through the foliage harmlessly high over the head of the fleeing man.

"What a damned foolish thing to do," Guard Morgan said with quiet exasperation. He was calm now. His duty was clear. "Why do they do it? Why do they always try it, when they know they can't get away with it? Why must so many of them try it? I'll never understand it."

"Maybe it's because there are so many of them," Guard Bartow answered, without looking at Guard Morgan.

"They can't outrun bullets," Guard Morgan said. "They ought to know that. Shoot." The fools! The poor, stupid fools! Whatever happened to them they had coming to them. And pitying them, feeling sorry for them, wanting to help them, was an even greater folly. They could not be allowed to escape.

"Maybe they're not running from bullets," Guard Bartow said, firing again. As he fired brakes screeched and tires shrilled. At the head of the bend the truck bucked to a halt.

ALTHOUGH the running man could plainly be glimpsed as he sprinted from sheltering tree to sheltering tree, Guard Bartow's fire was wide.

By now an uncontrollable flow of tears streamed down the girl's face as she plucked at her mother's skirts.

Steve, paralyzed with shock initially, now recovered. He flung himself at Guard Bartow, beating at him with his fists and kicking at him with an hysterical fury. All at once, Guard Bartow found himself

hard pressed to shake the boy off.

Forcibly, but using no more force than was necessary, Guard Bartow pushed the boy away from him. With one big hand he held the boy off and, gripping the gun with one free hand, tracked the fugitive and fired another short burst.

The wild shots ripped through the corn beyond the ragged curve of juncture between corn field and woods. Guard Bartow lowered the gun from his shoulder.

"What's the matter with you?" Guard Morgan snapped at him. "Why did you stop shooting?"

"Can't you see the kid is bothering me? I can't do any decent shooting with the kid bothering me. Get him off me."

"Shoot," Guard Morgan commanded. "Keep shooting."

The boy still clawed, kicked and scratched at Guard Bartow. "I'm doing the best I can," Guard Bartow said. "With this young wildcat climbing all over me I wouldn't hit anything anyhow."

"No excuses," Guard Mor-

gan said. "I've seen you shoot. Shoot him down."

LOUISA CARMEL leaped unmolested from the truck and started to run. Her move was so unexpected and swift that there was no chance to stop her. She took off in pursuit of her husband, shouting, "The children! What's to become of the children? Don't leave me and the children."

"Shoot," Guard Morgan commanded Guard Bartow. "Shoot straight. Shoot her down." Without pausing he barked at the driver, who had dismounted and come around to the back of the truck and was reaching for his weapon, "Stay out of this. This is not your job."

The driver slowly withdrew his hand from the holstered pistol at his side.

The woman turned and shouted, "I'll be back... We'll be back... Don't harm the children."

The horrified boy was so stunned and shocked he let up in his attack on Guard Bartow.

Carol screamed, "I want my mommy. I want my mommy." And, still clutching the doll by

one leg, she circled around Guard Morgan as if she intended to follow her mother down from the truck.

"Shoot, damn you," Guard Morgan screamed at Guard Bartow. "You know what you're supposed to do. Shoot her down." He wouldn't stand for this rebellion, this mutiny, this treason. Bartow would have to have a good explanation ready for the superiors at headquarters when they got back.

GUARD BARTOW slowly raised his gun to his shoulder and sighted carefully. Slowly he squeezed off a long, sweeping burst that sang high and wide far past the man and the woman.

"You missed deliberately," Guard Morgan accused. "There was no reason to miss this time. The truck wasn't moving. The boy wasn't attacking you. You shouldn't have missed. Not by that much. Now shoot straight. Aim true. That's a command. Do as I say or answer for the consequences."

"Take your own gun down from your shoulder," Guard Bartow said calmly, "and do

your own shooting if mine is not straight enough for you."

"For the last time," Guard Morgan said sternly, "I'm giving you an order. There's no time to waste or they'll get away. If you don't shoot, right now, before they get away—I'll turn you in for disciplining when we get back. So help me I will."

Guard Bartow's response was simple but unexpected. He whirled around to face Guard Morgan.

Guard Morgan suddenly found the sinister blue snout of Guard Bartow's weapon staring at his chest.

"What do you think you're doing?" Guard Morgan asked, looking from the muzzle to Guard Bartow. "What's gotten into you?"

"That should be obvious," Guard Bartow said, keeping the gun pointed squarely at Guard Morgan.

Guard Bartow stood with feet planted wide, the gun stock snug between elbow and ribs, holding the classic on-guard position.

"You wouldn't dare," Guard Morgan said.

"Don't take a chance on that," Guard Bartow said. "Believe me, I did."

"When did...?"

"Now...just now... You, down there. Don't make any moves with your hands. Get them up and keep them up. And come all the way to the back of the truck where I can keep an eye on you... And you," he addressed Guard Morgan, "get down there with him... Get a move on."

Guard Morgan and the driver obeyed. They stood side by side, hands raised high.

Guard Bartow sprang easily over the tailboard onto the road.

"Get down," Guard Bartow called to Steve and Carol. "I'm your friend. Come on down. You want to see your mommy and daddy, don't you? You want to go with them, don't you?... Well, do as I say then."

With a one-handed yank and a powerful tug and without relaxing his vigilance, Guard Bartow dropped the tailboard.

CAUTIOUSLY yet swiftly, he disarmed Guard Morgan

and the driver, adding their weapons and ammunition to his arsenal. He slung the gun over his shoulder and jammed the pistol into a pocket. The driver's pistol belt he tucked into his own belt.

"Now run," he ordered the children after he had helped get them down to the roadway. "Run. Your father and mother will be looking for you. You don't want to keep them waiting, do you?"

For seconds the children did not move.

"Run," Guard Bartow repeated. "Quick...quick... while you can still catch them. Don't make them worry about you."

He waved them off toward the woods.

Then the frozen stare on the boy's face melted into comprehension. Taking the girl by the hand and more dragging than leading her, he started off into the woods.

Before they disappeared from sight Steve's lusty shout of, "Wait, father, wait for us, we're coming," came winging back toward the road.

Guard Bartow said, "Into the truck now, both of you. Into

the cab... Move quickly, too... Drive to the Target City."

"Why?" Guard Morgan asked. "Why there?"

"To protect you. To show the right mileage for the round trip. Drive there and then go right back."

GUARD MORGAN said, "They'll question us. They'll want to know where you are."

"Tell them I wasn't feeling well. Tell them I asked to be dropped off near home on the way back. Then I went off my mind on the way back and ran off into the woods."

"They won't believe it," Guard Morgan said.

"But they won't be able to prove otherwise," Guard Bartow said.

"Where are you going?" Guard Morgan asked.

"You know where I'm going," Guard Bartow said. "Away. Away with them."

"You'll never make it. Change your mind. Come back with us... You can trust us. You can fake the records. No one will ever know the family wasn't delivered..."

"It's too late for that. I'm taking the chance. It's a long chance...but a chance worth taking..."

"If you're afraid of us—you don't have to worry. No one will ever know... We can fake the records."

"No...though that's been done before... No more talk. We've had enough... Into the truck."

Walking behind them, Guard Bartow said, "Remember, drive straight to the Target City. And don't try any tricks. I'll be watching you till you're out of sight.. If you try any tricks, I'll shoot—straight as you know I can."

The driver mounted into the cab and Guard Morgan circled around the front of the truck and took the seat alongside him. Guard Bartow stood on the roadway alongside the truck and kept them covered with his gun. Quietly the truck started, picking up speed slowly. Still moving slowly, the truck rounded the bend. From around the bend came the reassuring sound of the truck motor laboring against the steep grade. Gradually the sound receded. As soon as he was con-

vinced the truck was well on the way, Guard Bartow, clinking with guns and ammunition at each stride, plunged into the woods.

His huge, bellowing voice rang ahead of him, "Everybody wait. Wait for me, everybody."

HE WAS SURE they would hear him and wait. None of the family could have gotten very far. The forest was dense; the undergrowth was heavy, and there was no track through it; he knew how resonant and penetrating his voice was, and that they could not miss nearing it.

Moreover, he could not believe that either the man or the woman would simply run off and abandon the children. From a safe distance away, from behind the comforting shelter of some tree or rock, they must have paused, no matter how great the risk, and looked back to the road...

Steadily, powerfully, he pushed through the undergrowth, calling every few seconds, "If you hear me, answer me... Hello... If you hear me answer."

After each call he paused

momentarily, to listen for an answer.

A few moments after he started an answer came back to his call. He turned hopefully and looked back, toward the road, where the call had come from.

Guard Morgan was racing around the bend.

Tall and spare, he moved at an ungainly but swift run, like some high-powered, mechanical scarecrow.

There could, of course, be no doubt of his purpose—even before he ran off the road and into the woods, crying repeatedly, "Hey, wait for me! Wait for me! Don't go without me."

READIN' and WRITHIN'

BOOK REVIEWS by Calvin M. Knox

THE SPACE EGG, by Russ Winterbotham. Avalon Books, \$2.75.

If you don't mind a science fiction novel whose scientific premise contradicts accepted scientific theory, and whose fiction is mostly cops-and-robbers style, this one—published in *Amazing Stories* last year—is for you. It's an agreeable enough job, but it isn't easy to see what sort of entertainment value one can reap from it.

Russ Winterbotham is a

veteran s-f writer (his first stories appeared in the Tremaine-edited *Astounding* of the mid-Thirties) and his story moves along skilfully and at a good pace. It deals with the strange events that followed when Jack Fayburn, a test pilot for the Darling Aircraft Corporation, encounters a mysterious china egg drifting forty-two miles above the Earth while he is testing the XDW-49 rocket plane. The egg penetrates the plane's cockpit and in some fashion gains control

of Fayburn, turning him into a new form of life—and when he returns to groundside, he extends this transformation to a beautiful wench named (and I'm not making it up) Ruby Cascade.

What follows is mostly an involved and frantic series of pistol duels; the characters, most of them perfunctorily developed, run around like headless chickens for a hundred and fifty pages while the facts in the case gradually are determined. And finally a scientific type steps forward, delivers a clearly-constructed lecture on atomic theory and anti-matter, and hops from there to the exceedingly tenuous conclusion that the mysterious china egg is an energy entity formed out of "a debris of mirror-atoms, positrons, and anti-protons" which, upon striking the plexiglass canopy of the rocket plane, "combined with shattered atoms to produce a hard covering (the egg) trapping energy inside."

Unfortunately for Winterbotham's egg, no such thing is likely to take place; the moment the debris of anti-matter came in contact with normal

matter, Fayburn and his plane would have been annihilated in an instant detonation. Winterbotham chooses to ignore this particularly unfortunate characteristic of contraterrene matter, thus spoiling an otherwise impressive scientific rationale.

After that point, the book ends in a climactic welter of gunplay, followed by a would-be tear-jerker finale.

Since the science of this item falls apart at the crucial moment, the characters lack substance, and the background is flat as can be, the only virtue remaining to *The Space Egg* is its lively pace. Winterbotham does keep things moving along briskly, and from time to time matters do get interesting. But no one is likely to find his mind widened or his perceptions enriched by this book. It's a pretty forgettable novel.

THE TOWER OF ZANID,
by L. Sprague de Camp.
Avalon, \$2.75.

This, the third novel in Sprague de Camp's Krishna series, made its appearance as a four-part serial in *Science Fiction Stories* last year. Its predecessors, "The Queen of

Zamba" and "The Hand of Zei," were serialized in *As-tounding* in 1949 and 1951 respectively. It's been a long lay-off for the Krishna stories, and it's pleasant to read one of de Camp's swashbuckling romances again.

Not that this one is quite on the same level as the earlier stories. There's a lot less to it. In *The Tower of Zanid* the central character is Anthony Fallon, erstwhile king of Zamba, now rather seedy and mid-dleaged. Fallon, scheming to regain control of his kingdom, gets involved with a Polish archeologist who wants to investigate the Safq, a snailshell-shaped tower controlled by the priests of Yesht and regarded as sacred.

The novel unrolls in rambling picaresque manner, with Fallon getting entangled in divers side-excursions before settling down to the main business of exploring the Safq. There's a lot of funny dialogue, some deft swordplay, and more than a few flashes of local color—particularly when a Ter-ran missionary blunders onto the scene.

But the book disappoints be-

cause so much of its background is stale to those familiar with the series, and because its plot has so little direction. In the earlier books in this series—and in many of the short stories not yet collected—de Camp mined a rich vein of background material, creating a clever and detailed alien culture. *The Tower of Zanid* is put together out of the leavings of these earlier stories; what background there is is largely second-hand, and the whole thing might easily have taken place in some medieval Arabian kingdom rather than on an alien world. Readers familiar with the previous Krishna stories are not likely to find anything new here, while those just coming in are apt to be puzzled by much of what's going on.

Still, it's a remarkably funny book in the skilful light-weight de Camp manner, and I'm pleased that Avalon has rescued it from magazine pages. The Avalon version appears to be very slightly cut down from the version serialized by *Science Fiction Stories*, but nothing essential seems to be missing.

A MILE BEYOND THE MOON, by C. M. Kornbluth. Doubleday, \$2.95.

Death took Cyril Kornbluth in March 1958, shortly before his 35th birthday. His death ended a writing career that had begun professionally at a supernaturally early age, reached flowering in the early Fifties, and promised to yield milestones of science fiction for decades to come. This generous book, with its fifteen short stories and novelets, is by way of being a memorial to an outstanding writer.

The best of Kornbluth's 1950-53 material was skimmed off for his other short story collection, Ballantine's 1954 *The Explorers*. So neither "The Mindworm" nor "Gomez" nor "With These Hands" is here. Included in *A Mile Beyond the Moon* are six stories published in the last two years, two representatives of the early Kornbluth works, and six stories of varying quality that were passed over in compiling the Ballantine volume—plus a fifteenth story that appears to be seeing print for the first time.

The collection represents a dozen facets of Kornbluth's writing; there are potboilers and classics here, wryly irreverent and powerfully somber pieces, straightforward ones and involute Joycean ones. Included are:

"Make Mine Mars" (1952)—pure potboiler, but joyously funny withal; Kornbluth making use of his wire-service experience to tell this tale of a galactic reporter who runs into machine politics on a cold planet. Theme is stock; handling is fresh and vigorous.

"The Meddlers" (1953). This brief bit from *Future Science Fiction* is a three-page filler in Kornbluth's farcical vein, built around a sly little punchline.

"The Events Leading Down to the Tragedy" (1957). Recent Kornbluth, and very very good indeed, though not to everyone's taste. This mimics in deadpan manner the technique of writing reports to be delivered before rural historical societies; the story as such is clever, the style and detail-work magnificent.

"The Little Black Bag" (1950). One of Kornbluth's

finest stories, unaccountably omitted from his earlier collection. A beery, retired medic finds a doctor's satchel shot back in time from the familiar Kornbluthian world of morons; the medical instruments are designed to be operated by the fuzziest of fuzzbrains, and Kornbluth explores the consequences of the presence of the Little Black Bag splendidly. This is probably the best of the one-thing-from-the-future stories.

"Everybody Knows Joe" (1953). Another filler; not a story but an anecdote, a character sketch. It's amusing, though I don't understand why a science fiction magazine ever published it.

"Time Bum" (1953). Kornbluth spoofing again; the long arm of coincidence gets pulled. Chucklesome, forgettable.

"Passion Pills" (not previously published?) Kornbluth as raconteur; a slim, funny bit of pornographizing.

"Virginia" (1957). More of the same; a wild satire of the peculiarly bitter kind Kornbluth specialized in, with a funny if gratuitous ending.

"The Slave" (1957). In this

one, Kornbluth plays it straight and turns out what might have been a standard bit of space-opera in other hands: the hero is an ex-Federal Security agent who has hit the bottle, and who is dredged up and sent off on a super-secret mission—to find the galactic raiders who have been kidnapping human beings. The plot is the oldest of hat, and the framework tends to sag every few thousand words—but the notion of psionic galley-slaves is an attractive one, and the small details redeem an otherwise routine story.

"Kazam Collects" (1941). A sample of the kind of work the teenage Kornbluth was writing, under dozens of pen-names, for the short-lived science fiction magazines of the early Forties. This fantasy is not of his best work of that period, but it has the gay wackiness that makes all early Kornbluth such delightful reading.

"The Last Man Left in the Bar" (1957). An enigmatic, complex little story with affinities to the Alfred Bester school of stylistic mannerisms. Kornbluth at his most abstruse here.

"The Adventurer" (1953). Potboiler again, distinguished

only by Kornbluth's keen wit and admirable style.

"The Words of Guru" (1941). Another early Kornbluth story, and one that has deservedly remained famous since its first appearance. This, please remember, was the work of a seventeen-year-old writer!

"Shark Ship" (1958). A long novelet which reads like a cut-down version of a longer work. It begins with a vivid description of a seaborne culture, shifts abruptly to an equally sharp portrayal of a nightmarish death-worshipping society on land, and limps to a resolution of these two pasted-together sections. Despite its structural faults, "Sharp Ship" published under another title in *Vanguard Science Fiction* has

an almost hypnotic fascination; Kornbluth's bitterness, his quizzical despair for our society, well to the fore and make the story memorable.

"Two Dooms" (1958). The longest story in the collection, and easily the best: an unforgettable parallel-world yarn written only a few weeks before Kornbluth's death, and worth the cost of the book by itself for those who missed it in its magazine form.

A Mile Beyond the Moon is an uneven collection, containing much that is of interest only because it casts illumination on lesser aspects of the now-terminated Kornbluth career. Science fiction is immeasurably the poorer for the loss of Cyril Kornbluth.

A Fast-Moving Tale of Girls and Guns

The Three Avengers

by Cos Barat

leads off the Sept.

**WESTERN
ACTION**

Now on sale at all stands



blow that horn of plenty

by Wallace West

Now if you could just send surplus goods into the past, that would solve future problems of overproduction, wouldn't it? Huh?

"EVEN AFTER his hectic affair with the farmer's daughter," said Barton Thomas, United Nations Minister of Economics, "the salesman was able to go out and sell refrigerators to Eskimos. How did he manage that, Elt?"

"So far as the daughter was concerned..." Elton Twiggs hedged.

"We face an interplanetary emergency," snapped his boss. "Answer my question!"

"Well..." The U. P. Sales Manager chased after a vague memory.

"In this year of our Lord 1992 there are no more Eskimos," Thomas raced on. "But there are a whale of a lot of unsold refrigerators...and autos...and tri-di sets. Our economy is drowning in a sea of consumer goods. It's up to you to sell them to somebody, and quick."

"Me?" Elton hitched in his double chin and his smallish paunch. "But I..."

"You!" Thomas looked at him gauntly. "The economic policy of United Nations is based on Keynesian theory—the theory that consumption is

stimulated by the reduction of savings. But people aren't buying these days; they don't want three flying Caddies in their hangars. Posh tourist hotels stand empty while folks who are keeping down with the Jones's spend their vacations in tents on the shores of some Walden Pond. Savings keep increasing, and our economy smothers in a surfeit of consumer goods produced by automation with cheap atomic power. You can't pass the buck to your sales staff any more, *Elt*. It's your baby; what are you going to do to get things rolling again?"

"Pass a law to make 'em buy those three Caddies, I guess."

"That would condone conspicuous waste. The Commies would have a field day."

"Cut the price to \$50?" Twiggs was getting interested.

"That would actually increase savings." Thomas dialed for drinks.

"Tax savings out of existence."

BARTON THOMAS sighed. "That might have worked in the past. But now United

Nations is in the black. What would we do with the tax money?"

"Start a war."

"Who shall we fight?"

"The Commies." Twiggs brightened perceptibly.

"They wouldn't play; they're waiting for the Cap nations to die from hypertrophy of the inventory."

"How about inventing a menace from *Out There*? Then we could beat our surplus plowshares into atomic swords, take them somewhere beyond Pluto, and dump them."

"People hoard money as well as goods during a war," the Economics Minister answered patiently. "When the hoax was found out we'd be worse off than before."

"Maybe," said Twiggs, gaining inspiration from alcohol, "we could start a public relations campaign that would make 'savings' a dirty word—the way 'spit' used to be. We stage some patriotic shindig where people make bonfires of their bankbooks."

"Bank books are only *symbols* of savings, *Elt*."

"Why not declare a produc-

tion vacation, Bart? Stop the assembly lines."

"Elt, I'm ashamed of you. Surely you've heard how the telephone company was almost wrecked by that strike back in '63. The system had become so complicated that, when it stopped dead, it took the experts three years to get it going again. Since then, automation has become a lot more complicated. If we stopped the lines, nobody would know enough to get them started."

Twiggs licked dry lips. "What's your suggestion, Bart old man?"

"This isn't personal, you understand, Elt," Thomas said as he slipped an arm around his assistant's shoulder. "I think you're doing a swell job. But the Secretary and the Assembly are yelling for blood. My suggestion is that, if you and your staff can't begin working off surplus by the end of the year you'd better start looking for other jobs. We can't let six billion people down, can we?"

"I understand your position, Bart old boy. No hard feelings," Twiggs choked as he began pacing the office. "I'll come up with something...

Say, I once knew an antique dealer. She told me that when a chair, chest, or some other nicknack didn't sell, she'd turn it upside down and plant flowers in it." His narrow shoulders slumped. "But what could you plant in an upside-down Caddie?"

"You've got something there, Elt!" The Minister gripped the other's arm fiercely as it went by. "Don't know what you've got, exactly, but run it up to the top of the flagpole and see if it flutters."

BACK IN his own office, Twiggs dialed the library for information on Eskimos and watched as data began flickering across a microfilm screen. "Eskimos—Arts and Crafts". "E s k i m o s—Child care". "Eskimos—Mating customs". "Eskimos, Refrigerators sold to". He snapped the slow-down switch and read:

This feat is said to have been accomplished in the early twentieth century by James Moran, an American promoter. He sold a number of keroſene-operated refrigerators to Es-

kimos by a simple expedient: He showed them that, being heavily insulated, the boxes would protect their whale blubber and other comestibles from freezing in Greenland's sub-zero temperature. (Moran found a needle in a haystack by taking the stack apart, straw by straw. He also put a bull in a china shop—where the animal became so inhibited it did not smash so much as an ash tray.)

Twiggs cut off the report and sat in deep thought for a long time.

"Miss Green," he said at last into the squawk box.

"Yes, Mist' Twigg'?" came the harsh reply. In 50 years, he wondered, why hadn't somebody been able to widen the frequency band on which those abominations operated?

"What do you really want, Miss Green?" he asked.

"I .wha'd you say, Mist' Twigg'?"

"I'm conducting a survey: If you could go into any store on Fifth Avenue, and buy anything you saw, what would you select?"

"But I *can*," squawked the

girl. "Everythin' so cheap, an' ...oh, you mean... May I come in? I hate thi' contraption."

"Sure." He straightened his tie as a blonde vision tripped in, perched to advantage on the corner of his desk, lifted a foot, and pointed to a gold sandal, one strap of which was repaired with Scotch tape.

"I bought those yesterday," Miss Green trilled. "And look at them already. They're stuck together with..."

"Don't say the bad word," he thundered. "It's unpatriotic. Hmmm. So you want better quality. But, my dear girl, if those sandals lasted for a month you wouldn't buy new ones, and our whole economy would suffer."

SHE POUTED. "Let it suffer, then. Seriously though, Mr. Twiggs, it seems I never have any time to myself, any more. I'm always out shopping."

"What would you do with more time?"

"Why, I hadn't thought of that.... Let's see... I could go back to watching tri-di. Or read a book. Or even take up

knitting." She slid off the desk and started pacing while his eyes followed her wistfully. "Look, Mr. Twiggs, I'm not very smart, maybe, but I'm fed up with this and I know loads and loads of other people who are too. You buy a new plane —because the ash trays in the old one are full, or something. You take it up, lock the autopilot, and whoosh, you're in San Francisco. You have a drink at the Top o' the Mark, climb back into the cockpit and push the starter. Nothing happens. Can you get anyone to fix it? No! The thingamajig is too complicated to *repair*. So you wire the factory to send a new starter and go back to the Top o' the Mark. No wonder everyone's an alcoholic."

She banged her fist on the desk top.

"I'm fed up with no-good gadgets, Mr. Twiggs. I'm fed up with too many cocktails. I'm even sick of shopping. If you don't get me out of this rat race, I'll...burst!"

She did burst...into tears ...and fled.

As the door banged, Twiggs glanced at his watch and saw that it had stopped. Built-in

obsolescence! He dallied with the idea of asking Miss Green to get him a new one. No, she'd be shopping for shoes.... Must be three o'clock anyway. Time to close shop.

He put in a conference call and managed to arrange a 10 a.m. meeting with heads of four of the five principal utility trusts. (As usual, Power begged off on the excuse of a previous engagement.) Then he went downstairs and plunged into a maelstrom of grim-faced consumers. Everybody on Fifth Avenue seemed intent on buying something—or a multitude of somethings. Stores were jammed. And yet, he knew, that dogged, lonely crowd could make only a dent in the cornucopia of manufactured goods.

He fought his way into Cartier's and purchased a 1993 model timepiece that twinkled fairy lights and bells at him. Then he headed for the nearest bar. It was jammed too.

"YOU'RE OFF on the wrong foot, Elt," snorted Henry Mathewson, the burly president of Communications, Inc., at the end of a long and circular discussion the

next morning. "Automation itself is the villain, not the goods automation produces. In the old manufacturing days—the days of hand labor—a plant could throttle down to 75 per cent of capacity, if necessary, and still make some profit. Today, automatic machinery has to be run full tilt, 24 hours a day, to be efficient. What economists call the 'breakeven point' is about 98 per cent of capacity. Drop below that and you start losing money hand over fist."

"There's more to it than that," said Barton Thomas. "As an economist I can tell you that nobody makes a cent of profit out of an automatic machine except under two conditions—if you have the machine and your competitor doesn't, or if you have a constantly-expanding market for the goods the machine produces. Everything is automatized to the hilt now, so no company gets a competitive jump on the next one. And people are up to their ears in goods. But you've got to keep grinding out those goods at top speed to keep out of the red... Remember the old story about

the man who invented a machine to make salt,—and then couldn't turn it off?"

"I don't follow you," bristled John Morgan, a little man in pin stripes; he was head of Tools, Inc. "Automation produces goods much more efficiently than hand labor. The more production, the more profit."

"The net profit of Communications last year was three and a half per cent, the lowest in its history," Mathewson cut in. "Why? I'll tell you why, you robber: Because whenever Tools comes up with a more efficient machine, it hikes the price. So what happens? We pay five million for the new gadget, and we get damned little more than five million's worth of tri-di sets, or whatever, out of it before it wears out. Our gross receipts keep expanding, but our profit margin shrinks."

"We have to keep raising prices because Raw Materials gouges us," Morgan protested. "Tools' profit rate is no better than Communications'."

"BELLYACHERS! Belly-achers!" piped up Tim-

othy Gates, venerable head of Raw Materials. "We scrape the bottom of the barrel to meet your crazy demands, and you yelp when we send the bill. I'm an old, old man."

He coughed violently to prove it. "I can remember when they only had to go down four miles to find oil, 'stead of ten or twelve. I remember when the Mesabi Range still was producing high class iron ore, and we didn't have to make steel out of 80 per cent scrap. I gouge you fellows all I can, but it costs so much to find oil, iron, and copper that Raw Materials had only a three per cent profit margin last year. No private enterprise can survive on less than six per cent; people won't invest their savings in it. In the good old days, Cornelius Vanderbilt refused to touch any venture that paid him less than 100 per cent per annum. Now we make a measly three if we're lucky." He pulled out a handkerchief and dabbed at his rheumy eyes with shaking fingers.

"Gentlemen! Gentlemen!" Twiggs pleaded. "We need constructive criticism."

"Transport may be your

way out, Elt." Meyer Samuels, head of that industry, placed a long pale cigar between his pale lips. "First, let's analyze your problem: (Puff. Puff.) People in the Cap countries won't buy any more than they're buying now. The Martians can't buy your surplus, because they're poor as church mice. The Commies refuse to buy it. But if you don't get rid of it quick—our free, competitive, private enterprise system will collapse. (Puff!)"

"How do the Commies keep going?" Twiggs puzzled.

THOMAS explained, "They don't depend on the profit motive: they regulate production, consumption, and population. We can't do that—or rather, we won't; it would mean regimentation."

"So I propose that we develop star travel," said Samuels. "Export finished products to civilized creatures on some extra-solar planet. Exchange them for raw materials at a whacking profit. (Puff!) The way the British did in India."

"There are several hitches to that proposal," said the Minister of Economics. "In the

first place, Meyer, you assume that highly-civilized beings live on such planets. In that case, perhaps they have surplus problems similar to ours. In the second place, the Power Trust has failed miserably in its attempts to tame the H-bomb reaction. Any starship drive would have to use plutonium. That's fine for interplanetary trips, but mighty poor stuff for interstellar voyages. It would take years and years to reach the nearest star, and the payload would be small. Pure radium would be about the only raw material worth importing."

"You're probably right, Bart," said Samuels. "And meantime, the blowup here can start tomorrow. Like this!" He blew a series of smoke rings.

"Smash the machines, then," Gates wheezed. "Go back to manual labor. That's where the real profit lies. And don't tell me millions of people will starve in the process. They'll starve anyway, when this automated joyride is over."

"Substitutes..." Morgan began.

"I deprecate on your substitutes!" Gates hammered the

table feebly, then burst into a fit of coughing. "We're making substitutes for substitutes, right now. If we had plenty of H-power, yes! It's the fault of that skunk Johnson, who runs the Power Trust. He's not worth a damn. He ought to be fired!"

"I HAVE AN idea," Twigg interrupted to break the growing tension. "Why don't we just reverse the assembly lines every so often? We might even charge a whopping chunk of savings to consumers for the privilege of bringing their unwanted gadgets back to the factories for disassembly. Why, we could even *uninvent* things that people have grown tired of, like tri-di, and—" He shook his new wrist watch to still its sudden flashing and jangling, "—and horrors like this and the squawkbox."

"You're behind the times, young fellow," Gates said. "Right now we make people trade in their old cars in order to get new ones.... Melt last year's models down for scrap... But if we start melting down *new* cars, my suppliers would go bankrupt, and

so would the auto industry." He shambled to his feet. "I've had enough of this drivel. I move we adjourn."

"I know a farmer," Thomas spoke up hastily, "who rigged up a network of tri-di sets in his cornfields to scare birds away. Maybe..."

"Communications started marketing tri-dis as scarecrows last year," sighed Mathewson. "Sales zoomed and then nose-dived. The crows caught on."

"Some do-it-yourselfers found a new use for their electric saws not long ago," Thomas contributed. "Brought them to a political meeting and ran them to heckle the speaker."

"And there's a Texas oil million who buys a new hearse every year because he likes to lie down while traveling," someone chuckled.

"How about a contest?" Twiggs cried. "Winners think up the best brand new uses for consumer goods. Prizes can be log cabins in the Rockies, or caves in the Martian deserts. Grand prize: a small crater on the Moon. Say! This is big, isn't it fellows?"

"We'd merely be compound-ing a felony," old Gates start-

ed to object. He was shouted down. A few minutes later the meeting adjourned for luncheon after giving Twiggs a rousing vote of confidence.

THREE MONTHS after that fateful conference, Twiggs' box squawked.

"Mist' Twigg'," said Miss Green, "There' a...a man, I think...out here to enter the contes'."

"Tell him he's too late," the Sales Manager answered over a mass of forms on his desk. "Yesterday was the deadline for entries."

"He say' he jus' flew in from Australia," the secretary answered after a brief pause. "It won' be noon today there until tomorrow."

"Oh." Twiggs stared at the thousands of forms, in none of which he had found a real solution to his problem. "Bring him in, then."

A sun-blackened little man, sporting a mouthful of gold teeth and carrying a big package, limped in behind the girl.

"Here's your gadget to end gadgets, chum," he said cheerily.

"Fill out this release form,"

said Twiggs. "Then tell me what you've got."

"Time machine," said the Australian as he scribbled. "Sends surplus goods into the past." He started unwrapping his package. "Name's Harry Hughes, at your service."

"I've no time for crackpot schemes," Twiggs snapped. "Miss Green, show the gentleman out."

"Na', na', gov'nor, don't be over hasty." Hughes was adding and subtracting his h's with reckless abandon as he finished unwrapping his equipment and plugged it into an electric outlet. "Don't you go thinking I'm the Mad Scientist, now. I'm just an ordinary sheepman. But out back of beyond you have to have an 'obby or you start bleating. I have two...math and electronics. Since I've come all this way, you ought to let me give you a demonstration, what?"

"That accent sounds phony as all hell to me," Twiggs grunted. "But since you're here you may as well go ahead."

"What's the most useless thing in this office?" Hughes asked.

"My secretary."

"I like that!" Miss Green exploded.

"And I like you," grinned the sheepman. "Unfortunately, I've not had time to develop my machine to the point where it can transmit living things. The *next* most useless thing, please, Mr. Twiggs."

ELT JERKED the squawk-box from its moorings and shoved it across his desk.

Hughes placed it inside something resembling an orange crate that his unwrappings had disclosed, twiddled a dial, depressed a switch, counted ten, and stepped back with a low bow.

The crate was empty.

"Your squawk now reposes on the Czar's dinner table at the St. Petersburg Winter Palace in 1874," the Australian flashed his molars at them.

"Why there and then, for the love of God?" Twiggs goggled.

"To meet the terms of your silly contest," Hughes said patiently as he chose the best chair in the office, pulled up his trousers to protect their sharp creases, and sat down. "Send a thing like that too far into the past no one could du-

plicate it or even know what it's for, see? But Bell invented the telephone in 1875, so Russia's scientists—who were no slouches even then—will be able to figure it out. If you look in tomorrow's papers I'll bet you find the Commies claiming they came up with phones before we did."

"Why give our enemies a propaganda weapon like that, man?"

"So they'll stop *being* your enemies. It's part of my over-all plan. Here, read all about it on my entry form while I smoke one of your cigarets and make sheep's eyes at your secretary."

"Miss Green," said Twiggs as he took the paper. "Better get back to your work."

TEN MINUTES later, he looked up with grudging respect.

"Your machine can send our surplus goods back to the late nineteenth century when there was a worldwide economy of scarcity," he said. "Is that right?"

"More to it than that, chum. To do the thing proper, you distribute your surplus equally

around the world. Put the Russians, Chinese and Indians on an equal footing with the 'have' nations like England and the United States. No need for them to fight. No starvation to breed Commie regimes. No Hitler. No world wars. Sweetness and light. Heaven on earth. All that."

"But," Twiggs floundered, "I read somewhere about the man who went back in time, murdered his own grandfather, and..."

"Served the old bastard right for having a grandson who could think up such a stunt," said Hughes with a flashing grin. "Oh, sure, Mr. Twiggs, you'll change the present if you start the Age of Automation a century or so early. "But can you make things much worse than they are now? This straw-and-apple-flavored cigaret, for instance!" He ground the offending butt into the carpet with his high heel. "And think of the billions of lives you'll save. Besides..." He leaned forward and leered. "You don't have to do it."

"Well..." Twiggs remembered that the Minister of Economics had given him until

the end of the year to produce. "Well..."

"It'll be interesting," the inventor egged him on. "And now, gov'nor, how about passing over my deed to that nice quiet crater? I think I'll retire there and watch the fun."

ON THE EVENING of December 31, 1991 the Board of Directors of United Planets held a combined annual meeting and New Year's Eve party in a penthouse atop a magnesium and glass skyscraper in Greater Denver. The building thrust into the clouds from the mile-high location of the old Colorado State House. A blizzard was raging across the glass-roofed metropolis, but stored heat from solar furnaces kept the pine-paneled Board Room at a hothouse temperature for the comfort of its lightly-clad revelers.

The nominal head of U. P., Minister of Economics E. Thorndyke Twiggs, was acting as chairman and host. He was a lean man who wore nothing but spun glass sandals and shorts, and whose receding chin was hidden behind a silken beard.

"Miss Green," said Twiggs

as the hour approached midnight, "Will you please stop dancing on the table so that I may say a few words?"

When a blonde in a glass sarong affected not to hear him, he gripped her wriggling hips and lowered her to the floor with a thump. The couples jamming the room hushed their tipsy chatter until the roaring of the storm could be heard.

"Not a night to try selling refrigerators to Eskimos," said the Minister as he lifted his glass. After the polite laughter died, he continued: "I know that you gentlemen and your ladies are here to enjoy yourselves, but there is an important matter of business for us to discuss first. I have here—" He waved a piece of paper—"the first radiogram from the star ship. Captain Mathewson reports that the Alpha Centauri star system contains two planets."

A cheer started but Twiggs stilled it with upraised glass.

"Unfortunately one planet has an impossibly high gravitation. The other is completely covered by oceans. They resemble Venus, Jupiter, and our

other planets in that they can't possibly be exploited. Captain Mathewson has abandoned the venture and is returning to Earth.

“WE PLACED high hopes on the Centaurus Expedition,” he continued drearily. “We pooled our last plutonium to power the star-ship, so no more exploration is possible unless we achieve the nearly-impossible by taming the H-bomb reaction. Henceforth, we will have to make do with silicon from sand; magnesium from the sea; rock, and wood, as our only raw materials.

“All of which means that the human race has about reached its limit of development. We face an era of slow decline, hard times, and depopulation—similar to that which overtook the Martians.”

“There has to be a way out,” thundered Timothy Gates, robust giant who headed what remained of the Raw Materials Trust. “Confound it, boy, nothing is ever really used up. The metals and fuels we have consumed since the world started its automated production jag

back in the 1870's are still around in the form of dust. We need only build the proper equipment to collect that dust in useable quantities.”

“Too late,” shouted Jan Morganski, the Russian director of Tools, Inc. “My boys can't construct monster machines such as you describe without vast quantities of steel, copper, and I don't know what else. And Power can't divert enough solar energy to them, even if we could build them, without letting forty billion people starve or freeze. Boizhemoi!” He reached into the pocket of his shorts and brought out a handful of opium pills.

“No, Jan!” Morganski's tiny Chinese wife caught his arm. “You've taken ten of those already today. Have another nice drink instead.”

The Russian gulped champagne, pillowed his head on his arms, and wept gustily.

“Any other suggestions?” Twiggs sighed.

All shook their heads gloomily except Bart Thompson, U. P.'s young Sales Manager.

“We could run a contest, maybe?” he suggested brightly.

"Someone might come up with an idea to get us out of this mess."

"A contest?" His boss chased a memory around his skull for a moment, but it eluded him. "Not a bad idea, Bart, old man. Give it a good rub and we'll talk it over, ah, next year." He laughed sadly at his poor joke, then turned to the others. "In the meantime, drink up and eat up, everyone. I'm sorry the champagne is synthetic and the food is made of sawdust, yeast and algae, but it's the best the house affords. Remember, this is New Year's Eve, when joy should be unconfined." Again he lifted his glass to the whitefaced company.

THE SQUAWK box connecting with the reception room erupted.

"'Lo, gov'nor," said a voice. "Sorry to interrupt but there's nobody out here. Can I crash your party?"

"Miss Green," snapped Twiggs, "stop that prancing and escort the gentleman in."

A little man, whose face bore the characteristic purplish tan created only by long residence

on the Moon, limped in shortly bearing a huge bundle.

"Harry Hughes is the name," he beamed through golden teeth. "Pleased to meet'cha. Having trouble, I hear."

"How did you hear?" Twiggs marveled.

"Maybe grapevines grow on the Moon, too," Hughes smirked. "You want a source of raw materials. Right?"

"We sure do!" Gates escaped from a long legged houri and lumbered forward. "What do you have, man?"

"Half a mo'." Hughes unwrapped his bundle to reveal something vaguely resembling a toy steam shovel.

"Excavates raw materials from the past," he explained cheerily as he plugged it into a convenient outlet while the Board Members crowded about him avidly. "You set it for a period when the Earth hasn't been gutted...let's say around 1800." He twiddled a dial. "Aim it at some place rich in iron ore, maybe, like the Mesabi Range on Lake Superior." He fiddled some more. "Start it digging, and..." He stepped back and pointed.

"Iron!" Gates plunged his hands into the little hopper and let pieces of reddish rock dribble through his gnarled fingers like diamond. "Pure taconite. I never thought to see its like again. The world is saved!"

"Wouldn't say that, exactly." Hughes appropriated Twiggs' champagne, tasted it, and spilled it on the spun glass carpet. Wouldn't say that *at* all. But you're welcome to my gadget, chums...in exchange for a slight consideration."

"Anything you want," whis-

pered E. Thorndyke Twiggs. "Anything!"

"Miss Green," said Hughes, "I should have suggested this when I met you on the other time track: Your talents aren't appreciated around here. How's about joining me in my cozy crater?" He offered his arm and added, as the girl slipped her hand inside it, "The Moon's a nice place to relax and find out whether these poor devils learn to do their homework *this* time."

The lobos who had murdered Johnny Wiman had shot his sister, Marj, too — but Marj hadn't been killed. So Steve Doust figured, they'd be back; they wouldn't dare let Marj live. Only — Mitch Bronson wouldn't kill Marj right away; Mitch liked to have some fun with a pretty girl...

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THE LAST WORD



The Reckoning

TO ANSWER a couple of questions: (1) There is not much that I can do about letters, postcards, and voting coupons that come in after the issue containing a particular "reckoning" is closed. I have to send off the copy to the printer about a month before this time, but a few lines of type can be changed when closing date arrives. It has been suggested that I advise you-all of revised ratings, based on later returns, in subsequent issues—but that is, to say the least, impractical. (2) In order to be counted, then, votes should reach me before the end of the month previous to the date on the cover of the issue in question. In other words, although what you are now reading is being typed in early April, ballots will still be counted up to the end of the month—and there may be a little leeway. If this issue hasn't been closed by May 1st, I won't exclude any votes that come in between May 1st and the date the issue finally is closed.

To be on the safe side, all ballots on this issue you're reading should reach me by the end of August.

Here's the final standings for the May issue:

- | | |
|---|------|
| 1. No Place Like Space (Silverberg) | 2.22 |
| 2. Caduceus Wild — end — (Moore & Bradford) | 2.30 |
| 3. Here, Kitty Kitty (Reed) tied with
Weapon Master (Caramine) | 3.11 |
| 4. Android, Kill For Me (Wilhelm) tied with
Utility Girl (Wells) | 3.55 |

Several readers wrote in about the "magazine discontinued while a serial was still running" question. You'll find the most complete one in the letter section; and I see that my memory played me false—I'd forgotten there was more than one.

FULL ANSWER

Dear Mr. Lowndes:

In the May 1959, "Last Word", you state that only once has a science-fiction magazine folded leaving a serial unfinished. However:

1) *Fantasy Book* Number 8 was the last one, leaving Murray Leinster's "Journey To Barkut" ("Gateway To Elsewhere") unfinished. It appeared complete in the January 1952 *Startling Stories*.

2) *Space Science Fiction*, September 1953, ran part one of Poul Anderson's "The Escape". It appeared complete as "Brainwave" (Baltantine).

3) *Spaceway*, June, 1955—left two serials dangling: Ralph Milne Farley's "The Radio Minds of Mars" and E. Everett Evans' "Stairway Into Mars".

Then there was P. Schuyler Miller's, "The Titan", which was started, but never finished in the semi-professional magazine of the mid-30's, *Marvel Tales*. Being 1200 miles from my collection, I can't give you the date.

—NORM METCALF,
AF 19606033,
Box 033,

3419th Schron Lowry AFB,
Colorado

I'd forgotten about *Spaceway*, partly because I never saw the final issues on sale; *Marvel Tales* wasn't on newsstands so far as I know—although at least one issue of *Fantasy Book* was on some Manhattan news stands.

Thanks to Bill Deutsch, Leslie Gerber, J. Martin Graetz, and Edward Wood, who also sent in answers. Gerber and Wood mentioned *Spaceway*, in addition to *Space Science Fiction*, (1953) but you, Norm, were the only one to remember *Fantasy Book* and *Marvel Tales*.

EXPLANATION FROM
ALMA

Dear Bob:

Already several people have written to ask what are these unladylike three-letter words which I know, because they cannot think of any. Of course it is distressing to find that my remarks have been misinterpreted so far as to set people's minds into such an unpleasant and unprofitable direction. Since you quoted my letter in this May's issue, maybe sometime you would find room for a fuller explanation so that everybody can be happy?

Naturally, I did not refer to any impropriety in English. My allusion was only to the language of the quotation—which of course you recognize from the works of the great, though rather iconoclastic Middle Saturnian

poet, Sir Pnompfldromednapokarshiminhaklakhaklirriflefurkelahoodoodiletterhakfaykfan, etc. Everybody is familiar with the tendency of most language systems in the bulky planets, where the politeness of a word is in direct proportion to its length, so that a really diplomatic statement may have to appear in several volumes. In Middle Saturnian, the business dialect, it is customary to use words averaging about twenty phonemes, more or less, with no discourtesy implied as long as the number does not fall below eight.

Words become progressively improper from seven phonemes on down: seven is informal, six too familiar—except among lovers or relatives. Five phonemes verge upon brusqueness, and four are so blunt that it needs sharp justification defensible in a court of law. Three-letter words are either vulgar or quarrelsome, or both; two-letter words are obscene and one-letter words insane. It is a well-known system and one I did not expect to cause any difficulty, even in a cursory allusion. I am always being surprised by the number of things which young people under a hundred don't know; and I sincerely hope that this explanation will help to clear up any confusion.

We could do a lot worse than introduce a system like that into Fanspeak. It does such wonders for keeping diplomats and savants out of other mischief. By the time a resolution is drafted, or a protest filed, it is past time to adjourn for vacation, so it works out beautifully—no time for reprisals.

Incidentally, there was a most alarming misprint in the passage quoted. Whether my typer or your typesetter was at fault, I cannot say, having no file copy, but of course it *should* have read *flid* and not the, oh dear, other word. I just shouldn't let myself get so excited, but, my goodness, if people try to discourage deCamp, that is a frightful thing, isn't it?

Oooooooooooooodelyoodely,
—ALMA HILL

P.S. To think that letter-columns often used to bore me. Today I feel surrounded by friends. I, too, remember Bergey. The beauteous Bergey girl, fresh out of the beauty shop, not a hair out of place, yawning prettily in the face of every danger—even with no better protector than the equally pretty Bergey boy. Many a good laugh do I owe to those covers, and the colors were always pretty too. Your blue, white, and yellow this issue is not

quite so sickening as the black, white and yellow, but I go in fear of your lapsing into green, white, and yellow. I wish only good to your circulation but you might have a thought for ours.

P.P.S. When did all this nostalgia start leaking into science fiction?

CORRECTION

Dear RAWL:

Thanks for printing my letter with the Berry Fund plug. Would you please make correction as follows, at first opportunity: Fund HQ is Nick 'n' Noreen Falasca, 5612 Warwick Drive, Parma 29, Ohio.

I'm strongly in favor of your new covers; feel that most gripers are beefing

strictly because they feel the covers are Economy Models. So OK: you have produced attractive and distinctive covers in the process. It isn't everyone who can do it, and I have very little patience with those who refuse to give you credit for it. This gimmick of changing background-color enables you to distinguish between issues much better than some magazines who change illustrations but still give the same impression.

—F. M. BUSBY,
2852 14th Ave W,
Seattle 99, Wash.

Reactions to the new-style covers continue to be favorable at a ratio of 2 to 1, or a little better. And you've seen by now that we're learning how to get more variety and color into them.

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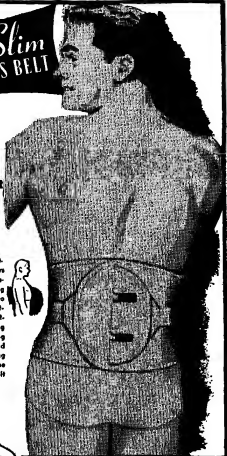
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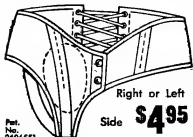
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WHO'S TO BLAME?

[continued from page 29]

come the "fan movement"—to use the term loosely, and in a very general way.

The initial science fiction magazine, Hugo Gernsback's *Amazing Stories*, received large quantities of mail from the very first issue, April 1926. And in the January 1927 issue, *Amazing Stories* started a letter department entitled "Discussions". Each issue thereafter published a considerable selection of letters received from readers, although no attempt was made to publish all letters received—there wouldn't have been enough space for fiction!

Readers wrote in to talk about scientific ideas in the stories, and chew them around; to criticize plots and style and idea-development; to talk about the magazine itself—what readers liked and disliked, what they thought would help increase circulation, etc. Some thought the covers were too lurid, others thought they were just right; some thought the title of the magazine was undignified, not representative of the contents, and not de-

[Turn To Page 122]

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signed to attract the intelligent reader. There was lively interest all around, and reading over those old departments, you'll find that many readers wrote to the editor frequently—some after reading each issue.

THEN IT became apparent that readers were corresponding with each other, the department being a sort of "get acquainted" center, and this was a good thing for many. Suggestions began to arise for a science club, open to all readers, with *Amazing Stories* as its sponsor, and the editor in charge.

This didn't happen right away. In the 30's, when Mr. Gernsback had brought out competing titles to *Amazing Stories*, and William Clayton entered the field with *Astounding Stories of Super Science*, under the

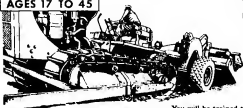
[Turn To Page 124]

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editorship of Harry Bates, numerous readers in various localities managed to get together and form their own clubs. There were also correspondence clubs. At first, such clubs were composed of science-minded readers, mainly concerned in amateur research and experimentation. They began to publish amateur journals.

Reports of this activity began to appear in the letter sections; and many of the club magazines had sections where a member reviewed the current issues of the science fiction magazines. Letters to the editors increased as club activities increased interest in the magazines.

BY 1934 it was evident that there was a considerable "lobby" in the audience of science fiction readers, and Mr. Gernsback finally inaugurated what so many had wanted so long—a national science fiction club, sponsored by his magazine, *Wonder Stories*.

The whole point was that the *lively, sustained interest in the magazines displayed by this group* convinced a publisher that it was worth his while to devote a fair amount of space to the "fans". In Mr. Gernsback's case, perhaps it wasn't too

[Turn To Page 126]



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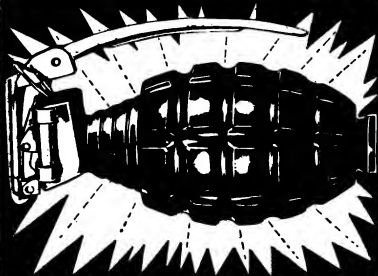
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difficult; he has always been very close to his readers, always alert and eager to give them what they wanted. (He hasn't been adverse to taking chances on something which would please the fans but which might not have an immediate effect in building up the magazine itself.)

And this set a pattern. In later years, when new titles appeared, published by men who were not science fictionists but saw a growing field for magazines here, editors and publishers alike were amazed—and pleased in a bewildered sort of way—by the letters that began to pour in. Not all complimentary, of course full of enthusiasm and suggestions. Not all practical suggestions, of course—but these letters gave one a feeling that the audience was there,

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ers called themselves "fans"; they asked for material by and about fans and fan activities. And when editors and publishers responded, the interest and flow of letters increased.

FANS DEFINITELY gave the impression that they cared. And when sales were good, it was a reasonable assumption that this "lobby" was helping the magazines.

There have been good times and bad times in magazine sales since. The "fan movement" has increased greatly. Where there were a handful of science fiction clubs and fan publications, there are now too many to be counted.

But something else happened. The fans gradually began to stop writing to the magazines. Not all, nor all at once—but little by little, the number of letters received per issue fell off. Fan publications continued, but less and less of their content was concerned with the science fiction magazines.

Still, many of the magazines were being edited by men who had either been fans themselves, or who had seen what fan-support
[Turn Page]

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could be like. It still made sense to devote some space to fan activities.

Time passed, and the fan-slanted material in the magazines waxed and waned, but the letters had dwindled to a mere trickle. The fans were still around—as noisy as ever off in their own corners—but offering less and less evidence that they bought science fiction magazines or read them any more. And as this went on, more editors and publishers began to wonder whether this material was of any value to the magazine. "Slumps" set in now and then—and then the distribution problem became acute. That is still a problem as the current mail still shows—a good part of it is from people who want to buy this magazine, but cannot find it on their local newsstands. No need to expand on that; too

[Turn To Page 130]

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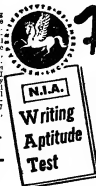
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many of you know all too well...

I RECEIVE letters and postal cards and voting coupons—yes. And I appreciate the interest of those who do write in. But the response is but a small fraction of what it was in former years—and I know that I am not the only editor who has noticed the difference. I receive fan magazines more or less regularly, and glancing through find for the most part that those who write material for them and publish them have a wide range

of interests—outside of science fiction.

Okay, fine! You fellows and gals have a right to run your own clubs and your own publications in your own way. But if you don't show me that you're interested in *Science Fiction Stories*, why should *Science Fiction Stories* devote any more space to you and your activities than it does to the activities of stamp and coin, model railroad, or toy soldier clubs?

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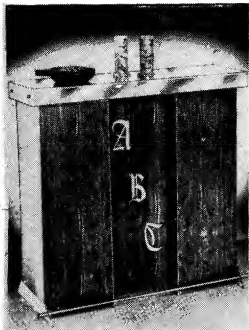
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